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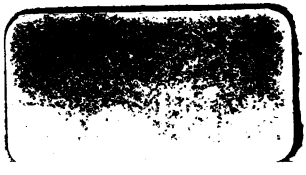

RUTHINGLENNE,

OR THE

CRITICAL MOMENT.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

DEDICATED, BY PERMISSION, TO

LADY DALLING.

BY

ISABELLA KELLY,

AUTHOR OF

Madeline, Abbey of St. Asaph, Avondale Priory, Eva, &c. &c.

" Be good—let Heaven answer for the rest."

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RUTHINGLENNE.

CHAP. I.

WHEN Lord Ruthinglenne perceived his mother's carriage at the Priory, and ſo abruptly quitted Benigna to avoid even the poſſibility of her documents, her Ladyſhip was in the drawing-room of the venerable fabric, announcing to Mr. Wallingford her departure for the weſtern world, and communicating her final directions reſpecting their united favourite during her abſence.

" All expences attending the diſcovery

of her mother," ſaid the Counteſs, "muſt be conſidered as my debt. Much of our wealth is indeed flown upon the wings of the wind; but there is ſtill enough left for Beneficence to execute all her deſigns. You appear diſpirited, my dear friend; but be not ſo:—only a few months will elapſe, when I truſt the Supreme will reſtore me to theſe beloved ſhades, and I ſhall receive our blooming girl again from your venerable arms. To be ſincere—my daughter's intimacy of late with Miſs Llangreville, together with ſome remote hints, rather create a ſuſpicion that our Benigna's chaſtened converſation and retired manners would ill ſuit her for diſſipation, that though it receives a licence from cuſtom, and a ſanction from faſhion, is reprehenſible. Should I, therefore, find it inexpedient for her to attend my daughter, with you, the guardian parent of her infancy, ſhe will be ſafe, happy, and honourably protected until my return."

Her Ladyſhip had imparted all that was neceſſary to Mr. Wallingford, when Benigna appeared.

"I come,

"I come, my dear girl, to invite you to a pleaſurable day—Euphemia's nuptials will be ſolemnized on Wedneſday."

"I ſhall rejoice in the completion of her felicity, and your ſatisfaction, my deareſt benefactreſs. It will choke me—but I muſt ſpeak it—" her coloured brightened—"Will Miſs Llangreville alſo——"

"No, no!" interrupted the Counteſs, with a ſigh, anticipating the concluſion of her enquiry, "Henrietta is, I fear, too improvident of happineſs;—ſhe inſiſts on being preſented as Miſs Llangreville, and paſſes the enſuing winter with Lady Grenoble, a widowed relative of my Lord's, and, when the whim of friendſhip ſtrikes her, with her couſin. But come, my love, I have more to tell you as we ride to the Caſtle."

Benigna now took leave of her dear benefactor for a few days; and with her heart relieved from an oppreſſive weight, her ſpirits alert, and hopes tinged with an indefinable brilliancy, ſhe gaily attended her benefactreſs.

In few words the Counteſs informed her of the extent of the Earl's misfortune, and the impending voyage to Jamaica; and ſhe had hardly recovered from the ſhock and ſurpriſe, or compoſed the tumult they occaſioned, when ſhe encountered the Earl, as has been related.

Benigna had a happy cheerfulneſs of diſpoſition, which threw a brightening ray over the ſombre ſhade of human viciſſitudes, and gave a richer glow to opening expectation. She now experienced regret, yet it was not ſaddened by hopeleſſneſs; ſhe felt anxiety, but it was not clouded by deſpair: innocence imparted ſerenity to her mind, and a ſweet dependance on the benign Controuller of the Univerſe diſpelled thoſe gloomy anticipations of futurity which render ſo many at once helpleſs, guilty, and miſerable.—With ſmiling peace in her looks, ſhe therefore joined, and congratulated the friends ſhe loved on the approaching ceremony: and in the forgiving gentleneſs of her temper,

per, offered every reſpectful devoir to her who had inſulted her unoffending nature.

Lady Euphemia and her noble lover had paſſed their time with few interruptions to their harmony.

"I will have my own way," ſtill lurked in a little dark receſs of her young unbending heart, and ſometimes it would burſt its indignant reſtraint. His Lordſhip would firmly reſent; ſhe would pout, then ſuffer a tear, that ſoft conciliator of an angry lover, to ſteal down her pretty cheek, when they would mutually concede, and like children, make it up till next time.

It was with ſecret and ſatisfied pleaſure that Lady Caſtledownne witneſſed the generous demeanour of Lord Aveline after ſuch a diſappointment:—there was no affected rapture to enhance the value of a diſintereſted conduct; yet it was evident his tranſports in the completion of his wiſhes, were only reſtrained by the modeſt, ſhrinking graces of his lovely, though fortuneleſs bride.

The amiable mother endeavoured to

inſpire her daughter with that generous dignified gratitude, which, if it does not overpay all obligation, is the ſweeteſt and moſt acceptable offering for it to the ſenſible mind.

"You are now, my beloved child," ſaid the Counteſs, "about to leave thoſe arms which have hitherto cheriſhed you, and directed your every ſtep, and at length conducted you to a ſafe, happy, and honourable protection in the very boſom of love and honour. You muſt be no longer the flighty, inconſiderate, haughty, paſſionate girl, but ever with reverence and delight have the merit of your huſband in view. Reflect how vaſt the ſum of your obligation to the man, who, in your reduced circumſtances, confers upon you independence, diſtinction, and, above all, felicity.

"Moderate then, my Euphemia, your own private expences, and proportion your general expenditure to the ſtandard of his forture, or rather his wiſhes.

"I fear not that, with your education and principles, you can ever forget the more

ſacred

ſacred duties ſo ſoon to be your ſphere of action. Remember the ſolemnity of your vows, the dignity of your character, the ſanctity of your condition;—you are amenable to ſociety for your example, to your huſband for his honour and happineſs, and to Heaven itſelf for thoſe rich talents entruſted to your care and your improvement; and though, in the maze of pleaſure, the whirl of faſhion, the duties of the heart may be forgotten, remember, my darling girl, there is a record which will one day appear in terrible evidence againſt us for our leaſt omiſſion."

Impatient for a concluſion to the lecture, Lady Euphemia ſat playing with her rings; and when her mother pauſed, replied, with a moſt diſſatisfied air, that gratitude was a poor tottering baſis for love,—it would ſoon overſet the fabric of her's; that the humiliating conſciouſneſs of benefits was too degrading to either elevate her ſentiments, or give conſequence to duty; and if Lord Aveline was of her Ladyſhip's opinion, it would be more prudent to diſſolve their preſent

engagements, than to form others that could only be broken by death, or miſery and enormity of conduct; that her ſpirit was too proud and independent to be reſtrained by the galling fetters of pecuniary obligation; and more, that the loſs of fortune had rather increaſed, than diminiſhed her fondneſs for expenſive pleaſures:—ſhe therefore entreated her Ladyſhip to acquaint his Lordſhip with her ſentiments, and alſo to aſſure him he had warning, and had full leave to either complete, or annul his engagements.

Before the diſtreſſed mother had time to remonſtrate with her haughty erring daughter on the impropriety and ingratitude of her conduct, Miſs Llangreville appeared, and with a bow careleſsly *en paſſant* to her aunt, whiſpered Euphemia that the curricle was ready for their intended excurſion; when the thoughtleſs, ill-judging creature, with an abrupt curtſy, left the preſence of her anxious affectionate mother, to attend the ſteps of a baneful and deſtructive companion.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

ON the appointed day Lady Euphemia's nuptials were celebrated with all imaginable ſolemnity, and every poſſible demonſtration of joy and feſtivity that a private marriage would admit of. Miſs Llangreville and Benigna officiated as bridemaids; and perhaps a more lovely and loving couple (notwithſtanding her Ladyſhip's affected indifference about the matter) never enliſted beneath the banners of the ſaffron-robed Deity.

Lord Ruthinglenne, glorying in his attachment, and diſdaining the concealment of a thought, threw many an ardent gaze on the

modeſt Benigna, who, perceiving the penetrating eyes of Sir Anſtruther Buckingham watching her every motion, ſhrunk alike from the impaſſioned glances of the one, and the ſoft, yet more powerful looks of the other. A certain conſciouſneſs ſeldom allowed her to encounter the intelligent gaze of Sir Anſtruther; yet there was a ſympathetic charm, ſweet and indefinable, that told him ſhe was neither inſenſible to his preſence, nor unpleaſed with the ſilent worſhip of his eyes.

The evening of the auſpicious day concluded with muſic; and Sir Anſtruther, during a ſymphony, found opportunity to whiſper a few words in Benigna's ear.

"The pleaſures of this felicitous day, Miſs Fitzalbert," ſaid he, repreſſing a ſigh, "have irradiated your countenance with unuſual brilliancy, and even given your mild eyes the ſoftened ardour of love."

"Indeed!" ſaid ſhe, bluſhing, "they are very unintelligent."

"No, no, beautiful Benigna!" he added, gazing as if he would penetrate her moſt

ſecret

ſecret thought—" No, no, the happy Ruthinglenne muſt feel their powerful, tender influence, and ardently anticipate the bleſſed day when the felicity an angelic being can confer, will be all his own."

" That day," replied ſhe, the heavineſs of remembrance, the thought of her mother forcing a ſigh from her boſom, " ſhould it ever dawn, is, I fear, far diſtant."

A nameleſs pang ſhot acroſs Sir Anſtruther's breaſt as ſhe ſpoke, and annihilated hopes that inconſciouſly had been cheriſhed by the animating warmth of his own paſſion. The blood ruſhed impetuouſly through his burning veins; and while a darkened ſuffuſion glowed over his face, in accents that betrayed complicated anguiſh, indefinable reſentment, he replied, " You fear!"

Benigna inſtantly felt the error of her dubious expreſſion, would have recalled the words, and explained that a mother, and not a lover, was their origin and import: but the propitious moment was paſt—the opportunity loſt; for, on raiſing the eyes ſhe had

timidly caſt on the ground, he was fled—gone, ſeated with apparent eaſe, liſtening to the bride, who was performing a favourite concerto of Haydn's.

When about to retire for the night, he approached Lady Caſtledownne, and announced his intention of departing next morning.

The ſuddenneſs of the reſolution, without any reaſon being aſſigned, raiſed conjecture in ſome, ſurpriſe in others, regret in moſt; but no entreaties could prevail on him to ſuſpend his purpoſe, or lengthen his viſit even one ſingle day. He took a kind and reſpectful leave of all; and in preſſing the hand of the Counteſs in a parting ſalute, appeared painfully and deeply affected.

"I had hopes, Madam," ſaid he, his voice tremulous—"I preſumed, am humbled, puniſhed—puniſhed indeed!"

Her Ladyſhip, ſuppoſing he alluded to his engagements with Miſs Llangreville, who ſhe then knew had diſgracefully broken all ties that bind the honourable, in the ſpirit of her

her feelings would have replied, and feverely criminated her conduct; but he allowed no time, for abruptly dropping the hand he held, he bowed in perfect ſilence, and haſtily quitted the apartment: and before the family had aſſembled to breakfaſt the following morning, he was at leaſt twenty miles diſtant from Ruthinglenne.

In a few days all was hurry, confuſion, and preparation for the Earl's departure:—he and his Lady and ſuite were to ſail from Portſmouth, and he had received letters, requeſting they would be there within a week. Lord Ruthinglenne was to accompany them as far as London, embark in the firſt veſſel for Hamburgh, and then he was to proceed on his tour.

Miſs Llangreville, rejoicing in her recovered freedom of election, as it made her more the miſtreſs of her time and actions, burned with impatience to commence her diſſipated career of pleaſure: and though Lady Caſtledownne beheld her increaſing intimacy with her daughter with regret and appre-

apprehenſion, and gently in private hinted her tender fears to Euphemia that ſhe would miſlead her opinions, and influence her manners, ſhe ſtill perſevered in her friendſhip, and declared Henrietta was a girl of ſpirit and enterpriſe, and perfectly calculated to eſtabliſh a world of faſhion in herſelf, and that there was no danger of a little eccentricity of character being tolerated, even adopted, when rank, fortune, and independence of ſpirit were its ſupports.

Lord Aveline either did not or would not perceive his wife's perſiſtence in wrong; but the mother's anguiſh was extreme and undiſguiſed. It was too evident to her fond watchful eye that ſhe had already imbibed too many of her friend's deſtructive notions; and that if ſhe had not entirely perverted her principles, ſhe was at leaſt infected by her levity, and grown emboldened by her example: and again the fervent wiſh would return that the amiable, ſenſible, unaſſuming Benigna were her companion.

It had not yet been mentioned to Lady Aveline,

Aveline, for her mother ſtill hoped that her new-fangled friendſhip for Miſs Llangreville would be unable to obliterate an attachment formed in infancy, and cemented by lengthened years of congeniality of ſentiment and affection.

Lady Aveline, gay, ſpirited, glowing in hope, pleaſure, and high expectation of univerſal empire, betrayed a reſtleſs impatience to exchange the old ivied towers and Gothic magnificence of Ruthinglenne, with all her old felicities, habits, and friends, for the more faſcinating confuſion of the crowded metropolis.

All was arranged,—all was ready for their reſpective departures,—only the deſtination of poor Benigna was uncertain, undecided, and by moſt unminded; when the Counteſs, weary of waiting for Lady Aveline's invitation, hinted that, the increaſing infirmities of Mr. Wallingford rendering his life ſo precarious, it was her wiſh Benigna ſhould accompany her to town. To the aſtoniſhment of every one, ſhe heard it announced with

with petrifying and unapproving ſilence. Her Lord made the replication.

" Euphemia will rejoice in this arrangement."

Euphemia bowed.

" Lady Aveline will probably continue to make a new ſelection of friends," reſumed the Counteſs, viſibly hurt; " but Miſs Fitzalbert's ſociety muſt be courted."

" My dear Madam, do not miſunderſtand Euphemia," ſaid Lord Aveline; " ſhe is but too happy to oblige you; it will much indulge me, and gratify herſelf."

" Yes, I would certainly oblige my mother, and indulge your Lordſhip," replied Euphemia, " but in this inſtance muſt practiſe an uſeful leſſon to myſelf as a wife—ſelf-denial. Benigna feels, or affects to feel, a too great love of retirement to be the companion of a bride of my humour on her firſt entrance to the great world."

" Which amounts to a tacit acknowledgment," added the Counteſs, with cold compoſure, " that her chaſte manners, and modeſt

modeſt dignity of thought, would be too ſevere a cenſure on your own. But be the ſubject concluded.

Next day Benigna returned to the Priory and her beloved Mr. Wallingford. The noble owners of the Caſtle, with their ſon and reſpective retinues, quitted Ruthinglenne; and Lord Aveline, with his Lady and Miſs Llangreville, who was expected by Lady Grenoble, left it at the ſame time.

No ſigh, no tear marked the ſeparating moment of Euphemia from the innocent attached friend of her youth; and a few weeks afterwards beheld her glittering in the *beau-monde* with the brilliancy of a conſtellation.

On her firſt appearance ſhe became the purſuit and admiration of the one ſex, while her reſplendent beauty and unimpeached virtue, her glowing pride and diſtinguiſhed condition, rendered her alike the envy, imitation, and deteſtation of the other.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

LADY Aveline, in the unintermitting whirl of every diſſipated folly and faſhionable depravity, entirely baniſhed the remembrance of the early leſſons ſhe had imbibed from the inſtructions and example of an excellent mother. No parties were ſo numerouſly attended; no *petit ſoupers* were ſo brilliantly ſerved as Lady Aveline's; no one appeared ſo faſcinatingly dreſſed, or invitingly undreſſed; no one betted with ſuch graceful eaſe; no one loſt their own and huſband's money with ſuch charming *nonchalance* as Lady Aveline, and, to reach the climax of greatneſs, no one daſhed among the virtuous faſhionables with half the glorious ſpirit as did the gay, captivating Baroneſs of Aveline.

But

But how, it may be demanded, did this ſuit the rigid notions and ſevere niceties of the tenacious Lord, ſo immutable in his ſpirit, ſo perſiſtive in his prerogative?

After her firſt introduction, he had reluctantly left her to attend the dying bed of a maternal uncle, on whom he had great dependance; and as the diſorder which carried him to a better world, was pronounced a putrid fever, though unapprehenſive of his own ſafety, he would not endanger, or even hazard the health of his beloved bride: and during the period of his five weeks' abſence, her Ladyſhip had eſtabliſhed herſelf a followed, courted votary of the *haut-ton*.

His Lordſhip returned late one evening in *his* ſober idea, though very early in the day of a modern man of faſhion.

It was paſt twelve o'clock, when ſuppoſing his blooming Euphemia retired to reſt, and fearful of alarming her eaſy ſlumbers, one gentle rap announced his arrival; and by the porter, who was quietly repoſing in his

his comfortable chair, his Lordſhip was admitted.

With irrepreſſible vexation he heard her Ladyſhip was at a maſked ball given by Lady Daſhington and Miſs Llangreville; and as a ſilent indication of diſpleaſure, ordered another apartment, and inſtantly retired, not to repoſe, but to regret his Euphemia's love of diſſipation, and to ſtrengthen reſolutions which a fond and devoted heart oppoſed.

Ill-prepared was Lady Aveline to encounter the penetrating glances of her Lord. With eyes half open, and an aching head, ſhe aroſe from a diſturbed ſlumber, tortured from the reflection of heavy loſſes, mortified from want of money to ſupply her card expences, and ſtung by the emboldened offers ſhe had been inſulted with, of accommodation from the inſolent libertine and preſuming profligate. Her every paſſion was in a ferment, and ſhe was exerciſing her irritable talents to the great diſcomfiture of her attending maids, when his Lordſhip's appearance,

appearance, in ſome degree, allayed the riſing tempeſt. The firſt *coup d'œil* proclaimed the effects of his abſence on his ſo lately blooming Euphemia; but he ſaluted her, and was ſeated.

Confuſed from conſciouſneſs, and anticipating reprehenſion, ſhe tremulouſly offered the ſalutations of welcome on his return, but they were *deſtrait* and languid; and though ſhe attempted eaſe and vivacity, they were only attempts. He penetrated the ſpecious diſguiſe, and in tender, yet deciſive terms, remonſtrated on the unbecoming levity of her conduct, adding, he expected ſhe would abjure thoſe deſtructive pleaſures, improper indulgences, and faſhionable depravities which ſhe had hitherto purſued with ſuch unbecoming avidity.

What might theſe naughty pleaſures be which his Lordſhip deprecated with ſuch ſeverity?

"Sacrificing every domeſtic duty to faſhion, every feminine virtue to gaming."

"Gaming! Oh dear, dear delightful gaming! Reſtrict her in gaming! it was the very

very ſoul of exiſtence, the moſt graceful of uſuages in the *haut-ton!*"

"And," added his Lordſhip, with ſevere calmneſs, "the moſt diſgraceful among all the immoralities of female life, and it muſt no longer endanger the honour I reſigned to your keeping."

"You grow ſerious, Aveline," attempting to diſmiſs the ſubject with a ſmile, "you grow ſerious; our friends will call you a tramontane, a hotentot, and——"

"Our friends may ſettle that point among themſelves," interrupted his Lordſhip, coldly calm. "I grow decided, Euphemia, and you ſhall know me your huſband!"

"No very enviable knowledge, my Lord," retorted ſhe, her boſom ſwelling with ill-repreſſed anger:—"but my toilet waits."

"Your dreſs will anſwer all the purpoſes of a *tête-à-tête* with me this evening. I requeſt your company. The ſervants are informed we are not at home."

"Not at home, Sir! I am engaged with

with a large party to the maſquerade to-night. Make your own arrangements.—I can diſpenſe with your interpoſition in mine."

"I diſapprove, highly diſapprove of maſquerades in general, Lady Aveline; and to-night I claim your hours."

"When you can perſuade me that your company is more agreeable than that which expects me, I may conſent. Learn, my Lord, to know that the high-ſouled Euphemia contemns compulſion in any form it can aſſume."

Calm, diſpaſſionate, yet in a tone ſhe knew reſolute and determined, he replied, "I expect obedience!" and immediately quitted her apartment.

"Obedience!" ſhe repeated, with proud indignant contempt, while her haughty ſpirit felt burſting from its ſwelling priſon, "obedience! monſter, never! I deſpiſe compulſive meaſures, and bid defiance to a tyrant's arrogated power: I will reject—ſpurn every deſire, reſiſt every wiſh, until diſdain, contempt, and obſtinate perſiſtence in

my own will ſhall teach the tyrant my ſpirit is not formed to bend."

The bell was now rung with violence; and before the waiting woman could reach the apartment, a ſecond peal reſounded through the manſion. At length their chief, and the lady's favourite appeared, and pale and trembling, reſpectfully entreated to know her pleaſure.

"Pleaſure, my girl! that is not meant to be my meed to-day: but attend to my will. Quick! throw on my peliſſe—I dreſs at Lady Daſhington's; then order *my own* carriage, and put the whole paraphernalia of Night into it in an inſtant. What doſt ſtand petrifying there for? Art thou deaf?"

Petrifying indeed appeared the poor waiting woman;—ſhe underſtood not a ſingle ſyllable of her order, excepting that part of it which ſhe knew could not be performed; and ſhe continued ſilent until a ſtamp from her impatient Ladyſhip's foot acting like electricity, ſhe cried, "I beg your pardon, but

but I do not underſtand your Ladyſhip's commands."

"Poor wench!" cried Lady Aveline, ſmiling good-naturedly on the girl; "I was partly inexplicable, for I remember now Hannah took in the dreſs from the ware-houſe. It is characteriſtic of my appearance this evening—I repreſent Night at the maſquerade."

Bridget was now acquainted with this part of her duty, and having wrapped her Lady in her peliſſe, ſtood in ſilent thoughtfulneſs.

"Now, Bridget, ſee if the carriage is ready."

"I did not order it yet, Madam."

"Why did not you then?" replied her Ladyſhip petulantly: "pray quicken them. I ſhall be very late."

The girl went out, returned, but did not ſpeak. For once her broad unmeaning face was expreſſive of ſomething, though Lady Aveline could not divine what; and having

always enough to do with her own affairs, deſcended not to enquiry about other people's. But now ſhe impatiently demanded if the carriage waited?

"I am afraid to ſpeak, my Lady."

"What poſſeſſes thee now? I command thee to ſpeak."

"Then, Madam, there is no carriage," timidly replied the girl, at the ſame time retreating a few paces from her reach.

"No carriage!"

"No, my Lady, nor horſes either; my Lord has ordered the whole to the hammer, I think old Barclay calls it."

Lady Aveline's indignation was mute, but it ſwelled her proud lofty heart to burſting; and as the pent-up rage increaſed, her internal reſentment heightened to a fearful climax, when, bitterly determined never to yield the ſlighteſt point to ſo arbitrary a nature, in a voice nearly ſuffocated with paſſion, ſhe cried, "Bridget, my chair immediately!"

"Dear,

"Dear, dear my Lady!" replied the affectionate creature, burſting into tears—"chair and all is included in the order."

The power of ſympathy is ſtrong:—the unaffected ſorrow of the poor humbled Bridget touched the heart of Lady Aveline, and even amid the whirl of paſſion, drew forth a tear, which in all probability ſaved the life, or reaſon of the high-ſpirited Euphemia."

The guſt of fury was ſomewhat calmed, but every reſentful ſentiment ſtrengthened; and the reprehenſible violence of her intentions proved how dangerous and fatal it is to reſiſt the power of a reaſonable and irritated huſband.

CHAP. IV.

"DO not marry a fool," ſaid a moſt excellent author, and ſtill more ineſtimable father, in his Laſt Legacy to his Daughters: "do not marry a fool,—he is the moſt untractable of all animals." And a writer of yet greater celebrity aſſerts, "that a man *of ſenſe* but rarely behaves very *ill* to a wife that behaves very *well*."—Lady Aveline, in the vehemence of her reſentment, would have ſpurned the actions of the wiſeſt,

wiſeſt, and diſdained the counſels of the beſt! She had reſigned the reins of reaſon to the guidance of turbulent paſſion, and ſacrificed every endearing remembrance, and every domeſtic enjoyment, to the reprehenſible indulgence of a proud imbittered reſentment.

Poor Euphemia! how widely did thy erring ſteps wander from the quiet path of happineſs! Did thy guardian angel ſlumber? or did the ſtormy guſts that ſhook thy beauteous frame, intimidate the gentle being, and in a wild diſorder and affright at viewing female lovelineſs, aſſume the rude deformity of *paſſion*, compel the mild ethereal eſſence to forſake a charge ſo precious as the guardianſhip of virtue?

Dr. James Fordyce, in his inimitable Sermons to Young Women, is uncommonly pointed and ſevere on female indecency of temper. The *fall* of tempted ſtruggling virtue, in many ſituations, the reverend teacher ſeems to palliate, and even pity; but for depravity of temper, behold his own words:—

" Starts of petulance may be forgiven to proſperity; fretfulneſs is natural to affliction; but what can be pleaded for a *paſſionate* or peeviſh temper, eaſily provoked, and hardly pacified?

" When I have ſeen a woman in the indecencies of rage, I have always wiſhed for a mirror to ſhew her to herſelf: how would the purer *ſpark* within recoil! But let theſe daughters of obſtinate reprobation proceed. I have only to ſay further, that a place awaits them, where their rage will have its full ſcope for ever."

Lady Aveline was not unread in theſe quotations; but the voice of thunder, or the harmony of angels, had been equally diſregarded at the moment.—" The hammer!" ſhe cried, ſwelling with convulſive paſſion, and reverting to Bridget's words, " the hammer! Inceſſant plagues purſue and vex the monſter! He ſhall ſend my feet to the hammer too, but not impede my purpoſe of to-night! Come, Bridget, lead the way: I have taken longer walks than

than to Berkeley-ſquare :—this is my hour for conqueſt, or for ſlavery. I will not eaſily ſubmit. Lady Daſhington will aid me, and victory grace my triumph !"

" For the love of God, and your own dear Ladyſhip, deſiſt !" ſaid Bridget, falling on her knees, " don't go—don't go! My Lord has ſuch fearful thoughts, and made ſuch terrible reſolutions, that my blood curdles to think on them !—Oh my Lady! ſtop then in time; for I know Barclay and Mrs. Winbolt are ſet to watch your Ladyſhip!"

" If I am ſtruck with ſudden lameneſs, or idiotiſm, I may be diſſuaded; but with my faculties and feet, Lord Aveline, I defy thee!"

So ſaying, ſhe gave the bundle, containing her evening dreſs, to her trembling attendant, put her jewels into her pocket, and, ſwift as paſſing thought, light as goſſamer, ſhe glided down the back ſtairs of her manſion, and without interruption reached the houſe of the expenſive, diſſipated Lady Daſhington.

Bridget was now ordered to return, and keep a ſtrict watch on the movements of the enemy; while her Lady, proudly exulting in the ſucceſs of her eſcape, haſtened to Lady Daſhington's dreſſing-room, where ſhe thoughtleſsly related in full her delectable *téte-à-téte* with her Lord, and its charming conſequences.

Lady Aveline had been introduced to her gay Ladyſhip by Miſs Llangreville; and it can little be doubted but they united in encouraging the innocent high-ſpirited Euphemia to oppoſe the quiet domeſtic plan his Lordſhip had laid down. The harpy did more. Daily declining in reputation, and loſt to honor herſelf, ſhe longed to reduce worth and innocence to her own baſe ſtandard; and not ſatisfied with having enriched her coffers at the expence of her inexperience, and entire ignorance of all games of chance, ſhe now, fiend-like, meditated the utter deſtruction of the faireſt fabric of innocence and beauty, that love and mutual worth had ever erected.

Lord

Lord Hareham, her diſſolute, profligate brother, was at once the promoter, abettor, and participator of all her infamous contrivances, and their ſucceſs. She had perſuaded the weak and credulous Miſs Llangreville that he was dying to poſſeſs her matchleſs lovelineſs and worth; at the ſame time every vile deceptious art was practiſing to ſubvert the virtue, and deſtroy the felicity of Lady Aveline. Her animated beauty, it muſt be allowed, had inſpired the villain with an incontrollable paſſion, which his licentious heart dignified with the *name* of love; but avarice holding the equilibrium in his vicious mind, he had not only defrauded her of immenſe ſums under the ſpecious diſguiſe of gaming, but actually held her notes for ſums very much beyond her *own* power to diſcharge. This memorable night, at the maſquerade, he had put every thing in train to crown his high impetuous wiſhes. The glorious poſſeſſion of the bright, the virtuous Euphemia, even

his avarice agreed was ſufficient to cancel the debt.

Lord Hareham and his inſidious ſiſter had received the moſt unequivocal proofs of the diſeſteem in which their manners and characters in general were held in both by Lord Caſtledownne's family, and Lord Aveline; and as the malign heart always envies the excellence it will not emulate, a dark deſire of revenge entered among the other baſe paſſions that degraded their natures, and levelled them with demons; and, but that the gratifications of avarice ſupplied their more craving and voluptuous deſires, they had no higher wiſh than to humble the pride of reputation, and reduce the conſequence of that virtue which ſo eminently diſtinguiſhed the characters of the united families.

Theſe paſſions having full poſſeſſion of their minds, it will eaſily be credited that Lady Daſhington liſtened with a pleaſure truly Santanic to poor Lady Aveline's detail of her quarrel with his Lordſhip; and could

could a nature, ſo ingenuous as her own, have ſuſpected ſuch vileneſs could exiſt and debaſe the human heart, ſhe muſt have perceived the ſavage exultation that gleamed in her rolling eyes, when ſhe added, with a ſmile at once expreſſive of regret and triumph—

"And do you know, Daſhington, the tramontane, having, by ſome curious means laid an embargo on all the carriages, I have *ſans ceremonie* crept down the back ſtairs, and trotted here *à pie*."

"Delightful!" exclaimed the arch one; "you only wanted a brilliancy of ſpirit to make you a divinity."

A few minutes attired the ſlight graceful figure of Lady Aveline in her characteriſtic dreſs; when, having haſtily ſwallowed ſome jellies, with a mind not entirely at eaſe, or ſatisfied with itſelf, aſſuming an air of eaſy indifference ſhe could not feel, ſhe left the baneful preſence of her vile deſigning hoſteſs, who was preparing to dreſs, and entered the muſic-room.

The turbulence of paſſion, the glow of agitated feeling was now ſubſided—ſunk into the mild languor of pale reflective thought. It was painful; and ſhe endeavoured to tranquillize her conflicting emotions by a fine-toned harp which ſtood there belonging to Miſs Llangreville.

The mind commonly reſorts to ſubjects in uniſon with itſelf. *Mrs. Haller's* plaintive air occurred,—it was congenial with her feelings. The upright ſpirit cannot long perſevere in error;—the meltings of a generous candid nature were ſoftening her heart, the mild tear of ſenſibility gliſtened in her fine eyes, the ſigh of awakening love was quivering on her lip, and in dulcet ſounds, ſhe had reached the emphatic words,

> "My ſoul deſpairs to be forgiven,
> "Unpardon'd love, by thee!"

What a moment—a ſweet, an intereſting, important moment for the entrance of a fond, attached, generous, yet offended huſband! In the full glow of reviving tenderneſs, in all the energy of feeling, and

and in the ſweet humility of a repenting ſoul, ſhe had ſunk on his boſom, fallen at his feet, and ſoothed him to forgiveneſs.—In idea ſhe was there; every ruder thought was ſtilled; every upbraiding word repoſed: ſhe was ſafe in the ſacred ſhelter of his dear arms. And Oh! how happier far——

Her delirium was ſweet,—was ſtrong: her lips moved—"My life!—"

In that inſtant the door opened. She ſtarted.—"My Aveline!" ſhe had uttered—ſhe had time for no more. Not her loved, her generous Aveline ſtood before her, but the repreſentative of Satan himſelf, with all his attributes about him——Lord Hareham ſtood before her!

At a faſhionable party the preceding evening ſhe had become his debtor to a conſiderable amount; and the arrogant familiarity of his manner, with the emboldened freedom of his preſumptuous looks, had not only offended the chaſte dignity of her modeſt ſpirit, but alſo provoked her pride, and mortified her ſelf-conſequence: and

and ſhe had treated him with that extreme diſdain and ineffable contempt, which the preſumings of inſignificance never failed to inſpire her with. Yet ſtill he vainly imagined ſhe would be awed, and her ſcorn reſtrained by the conſciouſneſs of pecuniary obligation:—moreover, he had been cloſeted, and inſtructed by his Machiavalian ſiſter how to demean himſelf, ſince Lady Aveline had left her dreſſing-room; and now, armed with imagined power, ſwelling with guilty hopes, and burning with the ſtings of mortified vanity, in obedience to his ſiſter's preconcerted directions, he followed the Syren where her ſounds attracted his captivated ear.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

THE malign preſence of the unwelcome obtruder diſſolved the ſoft enchantment of her ſenſes, diſturbed the ſweeteſt reverie ſhe had ever indulged: and when "the panting tenant of her contrite boſom" ſwelled to meet the endearing preſſure of a forgiving and beloved huſband, ſhe beheld an unprincipled wretch, who was at once the inſidious defrauder of her money, and the premeditated ſeducer of her virtue. Every irritated feeling was in a ferment; the burnings of repreſſed indignation glowed over her cheeks; and, with the lightning of contempt darting from

from her eyes, she would have quitted the room. With affected humility he impeded her purpose; when, breathless with passion at his assurance, and gasping for utterance, she yet disdained contending the point with such a being, but assuming a negligent composure, in dignified silence she seated herself on a sofa.

"Beautiful mistress of my soul!" exclaimed he, in affected rapture, and gazing ardently in her face, "beloved arbitress of Hareham's fate, what fears invade that heavenly breast? Why fly the lowly slave that lives but to adore and watch each rising wish? I am no tyrant husband, lovely Aveline—why then fly from me?"

"Fly from you!" repeated she, affecting an unconcerned laugh, which nearly terminated in an hysteric,—"fly from Lord Hareham!—Ha! ha! ha!—What, in the name of vanity, could mislead you to assume a consequence you never knew? Fly you! By all I love, I shall expire with laughing at the thought!—Fly you!—ha! ha! ha!"

Her

Her ſcornful ridicule, her taunting ſatire (for he had not penetration to diſcover deeper than the ſurface) fired him to madneſs; and giving bitterneſs and acrimony to every meaner and viler paſſion that diſgraced his being, he retorted where he imagined ſhe muſt be moſt vulnerable.

"They laugh that win, Madam!" replied he, with pointed ſarcaſm, a ſplenetic ſmile contracting every feature of a pale ordinary countenance, "they laugh that win!—thoſe who, like the loveloru Hareham, *loſe all*, may be allowed to ſigh out their complaint."

His pitiful retort reached the very ſoul of Lady Aveline. She felt his irony,—felt, with an anguiſh that ſpoke volumes to her humbled ſelf-convicted heart, that ſhe was the reptile's debtor: and her virtuous ſpirit trembled with impatient and indignant pride, till ſhe was ſo no longer. Smothering the gathering rage, ſhe repreſſed the fury; and, though pale from the conflicting agony of feeling, ſhe careleſsly turned, and replied,

replied, " Nay, *à-propos*, my Lord of loſings, you are not yet the bankrupt you lament—I ſtand your debtor for no little ſum: and as you ſeem in the deſponding ſtrain, until *my tyrant* takes a tamer fit, *this*," quietly drawing her jewels from her pocket, " this may adminiſter ſome conſolation."

" Bravo!" ejaculated the exulting villain, " ſhe will capitulate—I ſhall conquer, ſhall reduce her, carry her yet! Heavens! Madam," he cried, aſſuming ſomething like dignified reſentment——" Heavens! you would not ſure degrade me to a pawnbroker!"

" Nay, nay, your Lordſhip muſt *pocket* the affront. I always diſcharge apprehenſive creditors; and more, I cannot be obliged,—never ſtoop to obligation, unleſs when love or friendſhip binds the fetters. We are ſimply debtor and creditor; therefore, until Lord Aveline repleniſhes my bank, guard this depoſit."

The voice of Lady Aveline was firm, her demeanour calm and collected, and her air eaſy

eaſy and indifferent. Yet ſhame and regret, ſelf-upbraiding, and an apprehenſive fear of dreaded reproach, lay heavy on her ſpirits, and chilled every nobler faculty; while a ſaddened ſenſe of unexpected evil weighed down her heart. On reoffering the caſket with her jewels, by ſome caſual touch the ſpring flew open, and the portrait of her Lord preſented itſelf to her view:—the manly features, the ennobled aſpect, the endearing intereſting ſmile—all were the ſame; yet in his Euphemia's eye it frowned repulſive, looked reproachful. The encircling gems glittered; and as ſhe gazed, one more brilliant burned on her own cheek, and a pang, never known before, darted through her boſom. It was penitence,—it was tender torture!

"I cannot bear it!" ſaid ſhe wildly, as her trembling hand would have taken her huſband's reſemblance—"I muſt keep this!"

"Keep all, angelic trembler!" cried Lord Hareham, enraptured at beholding an emotion

emotion he reſolved ſhould advance his purpoſes; and taking advantage of her apparent diſorder—"Keep all! I am your ſlave, your debtor, your adorer!"

Strange ideas now ſwam on his fermenting imagination:—his hopes grew high, his wiſhes impetuous; every paſſion was in a whirl:—the guardian of Lady Aveline ſlumbered, her better genius had wandered from his ſtation, and the darker powers were buſy with her peace. She had preſſed the portrait of her Lord to her beating heart:—her eyes were raiſed to heaven; and in that inſtant the vile invader of her honor and repoſe threw his arms around her, and reſted his head on the innocent manſion of her ſnowy boſom.

She ſtarted—inſtantly recovered recollection; and with all the energy of inſulted virtue, repulſed the emboldened viper.—The ſuddenneſs of her motion was unexpected, and throwing him off his guard, obliged him to deſiſt: but the brutal impulſe ſoon returned, and while complicated

cated diſtreſs held her mute and immoveable, again he dared to throw his arms around her with preſuming freedom; and before ſhe could reſiſt, or he perſiſt, the room-door opened, and in a minute Lord Aveline, *in propriâ perſonâ*, ſtood full in view of the petrified Peer and the confuſion-ſtruck Euphemia.

To deſcribe the feelings of the enraged, the agonized huſband at the ſcene he witneſſed, is, for two reaſons, impoſſible.

In the firſt place, they ſurpaſſed delineation,—they ſunk in the exquiſite bitterneſs of unutterable thought; and, ſecondly, he confined them to his own outraged, indignant breaſt: and though his jealous honor believed Lady Aveline more culpable than even indiſcretion, ungovernable anger, and illaudable reſentment had alike rendered her, he forbore reproach, deeply concealed his reſolutions, and with an air of angry tranquillity, not unlike his uſual manner when ſlightly offended, or oppoſed in his

humor, he went up to his Lady, and in a voice half ſerious, addreſſed her.

"Your impetuoſity and impatience, Lady Aveline," ſaid he, glancing at the ſcattered jewels, and inſtantly penetrating the myſtery of the ſcene, "your impetuoſity and impatience will one day or other offend me beyond forgiveneſs. The condition of theſe your baubles convinces me of the indignity to which you have expoſed your own feelings, and my honor; and though I highly diſapprove the practice of gaming myſelf, bow *my* gratitude to Lord Hareham for his accommodation to you under the preſſure of inconveniences which that practice impoſed. Lady Aveline *muſt not* be under obligation to any; Lord Aveline *will not*. Take then, Euphemia, this pocket-book," preſenting one richly lined, "take this, and reclaim your *I O U's* from his Lordſhip: and remember, though I cannot ſanction your follies, you ſhall never endure a humiliation my power or tenderneſs can avert."

Lord

Lord Hareham had ſhrunk appalled at his Lordſhip's firſt entrance:—fear of merited chaſtiſement had painted his face with the hue of cowardice; and while he gazed with wonder at a forbearance ſo incompatible with his generally received character, he mentally prayed he himſelf might be allowed the pitiful ſhelter of his own inſignificance. Though an avowed enemy of the Cheſterfieldian ſyſtem, his Lordſhip entirely forgot the recommended ſtudy of the Graces in collecting and preſenting the ſcattered diamonds to Lady Aveline;—he thruſt one hand before the other; retreated, advanced, bowed, hemmed, and exhibiting every mark of confuſion and diſmay, almoſt forced a contemptuous ſmile from Lord Aveline: while her gay Ladyſhip, inwardly exulting in the moderation ſhe imagined her own perſeverance had produced in her Lord, actually burſt into a loud laugh; and with a look the diſconcerted, diſappointed Hareham could not miſinterpret, cried, "What a twitter the poor thing is in!"—and then very graciouſly

ouſly accepting the offered hand of her huſband, ſuffered him to lead her down ſtairs.

The reader may remember the Goſpel ſeed, which falling among thorns and briars, was choked, and never reached maturity: ſuch was the repentance,—ſuch the better purpoſes of Lady Aveline. She was no ſooner diſencumbered from her embarraſſments, than the tide of pleaſure ruſhed over her imagination in its moſt intoxicating form, even that of a maſquerade. It was the error, the infirmity of her nature, to forget the *cauſe* of difficulty and danger the moment the *effect* was removed.

Lady Aveline, in all the thoughtleſſneſs of youth and beauty, and in the pride of a high unſubdued ſpirit, no ſooner imagined her indiſcretion forgiven, than humiliation and contrition flew before her; and her heart continually bounding at the thought of pleaſure, again palpitated to ſhare the diſſipated motley ſcene, in which had originated all the vexations of the day.

In croſſing the hall, ſhe made a full ſtop.

My

"My Lord, do you go to the Pantheon?"

He ſtill held her hand, and ſhe thought he ſtarted; indeed perhaps he did, for the queſtion was electrical. His face was averted as ſhe ſpoke, and his voice ſounded uncommon on her ear as he anſwered—

"I deſired your company *this* evening; you ſhall have my attendance."

"This man was bred a Jeſuit, ſurely," thought her Ladyſhip;—"*mais n'importe*,—Iſing I O triumph, and *hey preſto* to reſtraint —I conquer!

The attending flambeaux diſcovered the coronet and arms of Aveline on the carriage. "So then *all* did not go to the hammer; he could reſerve one for his own purpoſes;" but ſhe did not make the remark aloud.

The fore-glaſs of the chariot was down; and when ſeated, his Lordſhip continued to gaze in ſilence on the ſtreet, while his Lady buſied herſelf in faſtening on her maſk.

At length a blaze of lights announced the enchanting rotunda.—"Dear my Lord, help me—I cannot faſten on this odious maſk!"

He turned;—the lights glared full upon them, and she met the glance of his piercing, meaning eye.—"I know you!" and dark determination deepened the sound,—"I know you!"

"The wretch is passing!" she cried, heedless of his look, and rising impatiently.—"Pray stop him!—Pull!—quick!—pull the string!"

He seized her hand.

"Lost, degraded! the *string* is broken!"

"*Oh Dieu!* at your metaphors again! but *I will not be controlled!*"

"Abandoned!" indistinctly fell from his lips; while he pressed his own cold hand upon his burning brain. Lady Aveline resolutely crossed him, and struggled with unfeminine exertion to reach the string; but, in silent and indignant anguish, he overpowered her effort, and in a few minutes the carriage drew up in Cavendish Square.—Before the knocking which announced their arrival, was finished, the gates were thrown open, when her Ladyship, with violence,

violence, and unaſſiſted, ſtepped from it, and burſting with rage and reſentment, ruſhed alone through the court, and, breathleſs with paſſion, ſunk on a chair in the breakfaſt-parlour.

"Send Bridget here!" was the firſt command ſhe gave, and immediately the girl appeared, with ſwollen face and tearful eyes.

"What's the matter?" cried her Ladyſhip—"quick!"

"I am diſcharged, my Lady."

"Who dared diſcharge you?"

"Mrs. Winbolt, the houſekeeper, by my Lord's command."

"Send the inſolent hither!"

This order was anticipated; for, at the very moment ſhe entered the room, followed by Lord Aveline.

"It was beneath your Lordſhip's dignity," ſaid her Ladyſhip, proudly, "to invade my province, and interfere in the female eſtabliſhment; but ſince it is ſo, go, Bridget, to my father's, and ſay to the ſteward, I order him to provide for you in

the houſe: and for you, Mrs. Inſolence," turning to the houſekeeper, "you may pack up your trumpery, and never more preſume upon my ſight."

"Begone, young woman!" ſaid his Lordſhip, turning quietly to the weeping Bridget, and putting a purſe into her hand: "and though I cannot tolerate the oppoſer of my leaſt command, I wiſh you well, and more diſcreet in another family."

Bridget inſtantly withdrew, and his Lordſhip continued—

"Winbolt, with ſpeed aſſiſt Lady Aveline for travelling."

She approached for orders.

"Wretch, keep off!" cried her Ladyſhip, trembling in an agony of fury:—"monſter, begone!—I will not move a ſtep—an inch!"

Lord Aveline advanced:—terrible firmneſs gave vindictive energy to his voice; his reſentment had collected more violence by the deceiving ſtillneſs he had worn in the preſence of Lord Hareham; and deep determination

mination now darkened his viſage as he approached his wife.

"Woman," cried he, "beware, nor further wake my vengeance! But that your mother's ſoftneſs riſes in a face I fondly once believed an angel's, I would tear my wounded honor from your polluted breaſt; a breaſt contaminated by —— But I ſpeak to adamant. And yet, although beneath my ſcorn,—unworthy even my revenge, for that mother's ſake, I will conceal your infamy, and my own diſgrace!"

High and haughty as was the ſpirit of Euphemia, it yet trembled at an awful firmneſs ſhe had never witneſſed before; and in rather appeaſing accents ſhe anſwered, "that not even in idea ſhe had ever wronged his honor, or her own virtue, though her thoughtleſſneſs and a love of pleaſure had emboldened a coxcomb to make himſelf ridiculous."

Lord Aveline replied with cold ſeverity, that his nature deſpiſed the conduct that rendered juſtification to a huſband neceſ-

ſary; that the hour of confidence was over; and as he had no time to waſte in idle argument, again commanded her to prepare for a journey.

Bold and perſevering as was her ſpirit, it fell beneath his reſolution; and while ſhe ſhuddered inconſcious at the thought of the journey, ſhe cried, "Indeed, my Lord, you muſt not enforce that point—I cannot go!"

He rung the bell, ordered four horſes inſtantly to the travelling-coach, and then deſired the houſekeeper to bring her Lady's peliſſe. A ſilence enſued till the carriage was announced in readineſs, when Mrs Winbolt re-entered, and ſtood waiting with the peliſſe in her hand. Still her Ladyſhip refuſed, ſtill reſiſted, ſtill ſhrunk from the idea of the dreaded journey, and again repeated, "I cannot—will not go!"

His Lordſhip, reſolutely calm, informed her that as oppoſition was fruitleſs, and obedience the only leſſon ſhe had to practiſe, unleſs ſhe wiſhed to be treated like an obſtinate

child, or a wretched maniac, ſhe would inſtantly conform to that will which would never allow appeal.

"Inhuman tyrant!" ſhe exclaimed, relapſing into violence, and attempting to ruſh from his preſence, "you ſhall drag me breathleſs, but never, never ——"

Lord Aveline heard no more. Fortified againſt entreaty by ſtrong reſentment, and deeply reſolved reſpecting his diſſipated, yet virtuous Euphemia, he ſnatched her haſtily up in his arms, and forcibly bore her to the waiting carriage. The whirl of contending paſſions was too ſtrong, too powerful for nature to ſuſtain—ſhe ſhrieked, graſped, and fainted;—ſtill Lord Aveline perſevered; he held her indeed in his arms, but as her drooping head had inconſciouſly reſted on a boſom, whoſe proud indignant throbs revolted from the preſſure, in accents ſtern and unbending, he commanded the coachman to drive on.

Oh thoughtleſs daughters of intoxicating pleaſure! why ruſh ſo near the depths of

dark deſtruction—why ſacrifice the peace and honor of your days on Diſſipation's altar—why offer up the quiet of your lives, with all a huſband's fond endearing love, at faſhion's ſhrine,—nor once remember in the wild delirium of each gay purſuit, that the heart, once loſt by indiſcretion, is rarely, if ever, regained?

That ſoft myſterious cement which attaches and unites congenial ſouls, was now diſſolved between Lord Aveline and his beautiful wife;—ſhe had ſpurned his counſels, defied his authority, and diſregarded his affection: his eſteem was thereby forfeited, his confidence loſt, and every ſofter feeling of his ardent tender nature chilled, repreſſed, deadened. The tear, the ſmile, the ſoft conceſſion could no longer ſooth him: the magic of her ſoftneſs, which once could charm the ſpirit of immutability in his boſom, was felt no more; the enchantment was broken; there was nothing to enervate the daring purpoſe of ſtern determination;

for the beautiful admired Euphemia was no longer loved.

When Lord Aveline quitted the preſence of his provoked, indignant Euphemia, he determined to impede her in the deſtructive career ſhe was purſuing by the moſt deciſive meaſures in his power; and wiſely judging ſhe could be brought to no ſenſe of error while ſupported in her indiſcretions by a diſſipated acquaintance, as the firſt ſtep towards the enforcement of his will, he actually gave orders that all his carriages ſhould be ſent to Chriſtie's, and there to remain until his further pleaſure was known. This, he imagined, would effectually detain her at home; when he hoped, by kind, yet firm remonſtrance, to convince her, when the ſtorm of paſſion was ſtilled, that her honor and happineſs were his firſt and deareſt conſiderations. Her Ladyſhip not appearing when dinner was ſerved, he deſired her preſence: the anſwer was—her Ladyſhip would dine in her dreſſing-room. Calm, unmoved, and reſolved, Lord Aveline ſeated himſelf at table, and ſlightly partook of the ſolitary

repaſt; and after it was removed, having given ſome hours to reflection, he went up to his Lady's apartments;—there, from ſome of her inferior attendants, he learned that ſhe had left the houſe on foot, and intended to dreſs at Lady Daſhington's for the maſquerade.

Lord Aveline then formed a reſolution, and inſtantly put it in execution. He followed to Lady Daſhington's, when the ſcene which preſented itſelf to his petrified anguiſhed ſight, confirmed every ſtern reſolution, and diſſolved the power of Euphemia over the heart of her Lord.

But we muſt now leave the miſled and ill-adviſed beauty to the care and guidance of her incenſed and reſentful huſband, and reviſit poor Benigna and her declining benefactor in the ſolitude of Ruthinglenne Priory.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

BENIGNA had taken a melancholy leave of Lady Caſtledownne;—it was ſorrowful—it was ſilent; for not all the tender aſſurances could impart one ray of conſolation, or give utterance to a ſingle word, and in ſpeechleſs grief ſhe threw herſelf into the carriage.

Lord Ruthinglenne was preſent at the ceremony; and though the frowns of his father, the intelligent eyes of his mother, and the beſeeching looks of Benigna herſelf, all combined to interdict his attendance, he proudly defied reſtriction; and equally unintimidated by the one, as diſcouraged by the

others, he ascended the carriage, and desired it might drive on.

During the ride the most saddened and depressive recollections took possession of Benigna's mind:—she had parted from a beloved and reverenced benefactress, who was about to encounter all the perils of the foaming ocean, and sustain all the dangers of a burning and unhealthy climate. She was estranged, deserted by the sweet sister of her infancy, the friend of her maturer years; the amiable, the sensible Sir Anstruther Buckingham, he had quitted her without one cordial farewel—without one word on which delighted memory could secretly dwell—left her, under misapprehension, to regret and to sadness. He would see Miss Llangreville daily—he would love her again; while poor Benigna would soon be as unremembered as if never seen.

"Can I claim no thought—no look?" said Lord Ruthinglenne at length in a soft reproaching tone. He had watched the varying colour of her cheek as idea flitted

over

over imagination, and perceiving no glance towards himself, had interrupted the saddened reverie in which she appeared sunk.

"Not one, Benigna?" he repeated, "in moments of tort uring separation—not one for me?"

"Do not reproach me now, Augustus!" replied she: "my friends have all my thoughts."

"That assurance is vague and unsatisfactory indeed: do you make no distinctions—has no one pre-eminence in your mind?"

"Unsatisfied myself, Ruthinglenne, what can I impart to another?"

"Rapture to me, thou cold insensible!"

"You are going, my Lord," resumed Benigna, somewhat more collected, "where the distinctions of your condition will open new scenes to your view; and in that world where alliance and wealth are so estimable, the humbler pretensions of innocence, unconnected virtue, and helpless indigence may soon be forgotten. In the spirit of your

your preſent feelings you will pronounce this impoſſible; but it is a peculiarity, perhaps, not improper to be encouraged in my ſituation, to look forward to the poſſible as well as probable, as it may ſave me from the ſting of pining regret, and the gnawing worm of diſappointment hereafter."

Joy ſparkled in his ſhining eyes as ſhe ſpoke, and he folded her to his beating boſom.

"Enchanting girl! is love the origin of that ſoft fear?—Oh Benigna! but I muſt not truſt your dutiful, your nice, tenacious heart with all my purpoſes. Yet Oh, be calm, ſecure; be happy in the aſſurance that only the eternal fiat of our God ſhall divide us!"

A ſoftened gratitude now pervaded her deſolate boſom, and glowed in brightened colours on her lovely cheek: ſhe conſidered him the only being intereſted in her fate, and ſincerely attached to her even in her friendleſs condition. The idea diffuſed a ſerenity over her feelings; and a variety of gayer

gayer hopes—hopes without either origin or view, gave an elaſticity to thought that dreſſed her expreſſive face in the ſweet ſmile of compoſure; ſo that when ſhe reached the Priory, ſhe had acquired a placidity of countenance and manner that much gratified the anxious heart of her venerable benefactor.

The family at the Caſtle had been but a very few weeks abſent when Benigna recovered her accuſtomed equality of temper and ſpirits:—her attentions to all within her narrow circle were amiable and endearing; and, by diverſifying her domeſtic occupations and amuſements, ſolitude loſt a large portion of its heavy gloom. Mr. Wallingford's health appeared in no way alarming, but ſeemed ſlowly yielding to the gradual decay of nature, which might quiver with tranſient brightneſs for a lengthened time before it was totally extinguiſhed.

She had reſumed all her uſual little pleaſures: her plants, her birds, her grandmother's old harpſichord, and her own harp, all aſſiſted

assisted to beguile time of its dreary *ennui*, and thought of its aching bitterness.

Mr. Wallingford had written to his niece in Dublin, and instructed her in the most probable means of discovering the mother of Benigna, and also mentioned his desire that she might repay his former tenderness and care, by protecting his beloved *protegée*, should he die before Lady Castledownne's return to England.

How gay and pleasurable were Benigna's anticipations as to the result of these letters!—Oh youth! thou season of hilarity and joy! how brilliant are thy visions, how sweet thy succession of gay hopes, fond desires, ardent wishes, high delights, and unfounded fancies!—But survey the contrast of declining age, "the lack-lustre eye," the reverend head, the wearied heart—penetrate there!—all is marked with gloom, melancholy, disappointment, and increasing sorrow!

Several weeks elapsed, and still no answer arrived from Ireland. Perhaps patience was not among the most prominent of Benigna's virtues;

virtues; for, to ſay the truth, her expectation ſickened, and ſhe began to murmur at the delay.

They are negligent—have not the ſtimulative I ſhould have for exertion, inveſtigation and diſpatch. Oh! no, they have no mother to ſeek—no mother to find!—Bleſſed, bleſſed being, doſt thou yet exiſt?

Immerſed in the depth of theſe contemplations, ſhe one morning forgot that the uſual hour of breakfaſt was paſt, and that Mr. Wallingford would be waiting for his chocolate; ſhe therefore with quickneſs recalled her ſcattered thoughts, and, with her uſual quietneſs, deſcended to prepare the repaſt.

The parlour was ſtill vacant; the fire had burned hollow, and the kettle was almoſt dry:—the hour eleven, and ſtill Mr. Wallingford had not quitted his chamber, or rung his bell.

Old Dorothy appeared, and while repairing the fire, "wiſhed Miſs would go and call her maſter; but may be he would like to

to breakfaſt in bed; he did ſometimes—to be ſure he did, but then he uſed to ring his bell:—but pray, Miſs, go," added Dorothy.

Miſs Benigna felt no inclination—ſhewed no alacrity for the office; a fearful thought darted acroſs her mind, and, almoſt transfixed to her chair, ſhe cried "I cannot go!—Dear Dorothy, go you,—I cannot!"

CHAP. VII.

THE hour had paſſed with Mr. Wallingford! he had done with mortality! The awful curtain between human life and eternity was withdrawn, and he ſurveyed the ſurpaſſing wonders of a better world!

He had no ungoverned paſſion to ſubdue—no improper thought to control: ſorrow had chaſtened the common pride of humanity,

humanity, and religion had purified and prepared him for the preſence of his God. The awful melancholy pauſe of nature, when the conſcious ſpirit ſhivers on the brink of ſeparation, had been ſerened by hope, and ſuſtained by faith; and without the bitter pang of ſaying *farewel* to the dear helpleſs being he loved, he had winged his flight to the boſom of *Him*, who perhaps, in mercy, would appoint him the guardian of her, whom, while on earth, he had delighted to cheriſh and protect.

The feelings of the generous and gentle heart on eternal privation from thoſe that are dear and eſtimable, have been ſo often experienced, and ſo often delineated, that a repetition of Benigna's ſuffering for the ſudden and unexpected death of her earlieſt benefactor, could neither yield ſatisfaction to the curious, nor pleaſure to the good. Benigna performed every requiſite duty with decency, compoſure, and propriety; and though ſhe knew herſelf an iſolated being, without one friend to comfort, ſuſtain, or direct

direct her future steps, she resigned not to those enervating reflections which could only disarm fortitude of its powers, and repress the natural energy of an active mind.

Mr. Wallingford's remains, according to his own desire, were reposed at the feet of Benigna's grandfather; and by his will, after Dorothy and Timothy had received thirty pounds each, with a suit of decent mourning, and a new Bible, Benigna found herself heiress to eight hundred pounds, a few valuable books, her harp, and her grandmother's old harpsichord.

Time, the pacifier of every grief—the qualifier of every affliction, at length subdued the poignancy of Benigna's feelings, and reduced her sorrow to that mild and tempered melancholy, which moderates the grief of a good heart, and that would soften the callous hardness of a bad one.

"He may look down with delighted complacency," said she one day, the spirit of a holy enthusiasm shining in her eyes—"and behold the child of his adoption and care

care purſuing that line of conduct he would have directed; and never will I diverge from that I know he would approve: he ſhall ſtill love; ſtill guide, ſtill bleſs his poor Benigna!"

A very few days after Mr. Wallingford's funeral, Benigna wrote to Ireland, announced his death, encloſed a copy of his will, and entreated to know if they had been ſo fortunate as to obtain any intelligence that could lead to a diſcovery of the buſineſs her late lamented benefactor had with ſuch ardency requeſted. She next addreſſed her ſtill beloved Euphemia, mentioned Mr. Wallingford's death, her lonely unprotected condition, and entreated ſhe would vouchſafe to direct her how to act, as ſhe had received no tidings from Ireland whether they would grant her a refuge, or if they had made any diſcovery reſpecting that which, ſleeping and waking, purſued her buſy fancy—a mother!

Week after week elapſed, and ſtill no letters arrived to relieve her anxiety; and all her

her viſionary plans were fading into air and nothingneſs, when one morning Timothy, with a cheerful aſpect, preſented two enormous letters, both ſealed with black.

"Now!" ſhe cried, her heart ſwelling high, and gaſping through agitation as ſhe uncloſed the one bearing the Dublin poſt-mark—"Now——!" But eagerneſs ſuſpended further utterance, and with wild impatience ſhe glanced her eyes over the contents.

The nearer we approach our wiſhes, the more ſevere and inſupportable becomes the diſappointment of them. The letter was from Mrs. Donnellan, the niece to whom Mr. Wallingford had recommended Benigna, and on whoſe gratitude he had ſuch claims; at leaſt it was her reply, though written by her huſband. The gentleman "regretted the death of their relative, but he was full of days.

"Their enquiries reſpecting Enſign Fitzalbert's marriage had been unſucceſsful; report indeed ſtated that a gentleman of that name, much about that time, had intrigued

with an Elizabeth Macguire, the daughter of an obſcure innkeeper in Dublin, and that a female child was the conſequence of the connection. But their intelligence might be inaccurate, and not ſufficiently authentic to authorize Miſs Fitzalbert to ſuppoſe herſelf the fruit of that amour; they were ſorry they could not give more ſatisfaction on the ſubject.

"As to receiving a lady of ſuch high merit and breeding as Miſs Fitzalbert, it was quite out of all reaſon:—they had daughters of their own, plain decent girls, brought up to be *uſeful*, therefore the example of a fine lady might be dangerous: and more, as Mr. Wallingford had not enriched them by his legacy, it was their parents' duty to take care that it did not impoveriſh them. With ſo genteel an independence, Miſs Fitzalbert could neither want friends nor a home: therefore he took his leave, being

"Her very much-obliged ſervant,

"PATRICK DONNELLAN."

The

The letter fell from Benigna's hand; her eyes filled with tears, and her own generous bosom swelled with indignation, insulted pride, and wounded delicacy.—"This—this!" she cried, "from my benefactor's niece! Pitiful spirit! one kindly thought could have purchased from me that which excites your anger and resentment.—Intrigued with Elizabeth Macguire! No—I feel she could not be my mother. Ungentle, unfeeling world! is it on thy friendships I am cast! to thy illiberalities exposed!—But away, ungracious scrawl!" she added, spurning the once so ardently desired letter with her foot—"away! thou shalt, if possible, no more contaminate the mansion of my breast with even a single thought! And come, sweet harbinger of my Euphemia's love! Euphemia, child of thy mother! thou, though enshrined in greatness, surrounded with felicity, wilt descend to the soft office of composing thy poor Benigna's sorrows, and obliterate a meanness from her memory thy gentle nature never knew. Dear memorial

of

of love!" ſhe cried, kiſſing the letter, while the moſt precious recollections crowded on her grateful mind; her poor fingers trembled —her heart throbbed.—"Dear Benigna!" was the commencement:—a moment ſhe pauſed. "Euphemia uſed to call me, loved ſiſter of her heart!" But it was the hour of diſappointment to our heroine; ſhe was commencing her intercourſe with the world. Imagination had painted its various inhabitants by the fair ſtandard of her own guileleſs heart, and the dark colorings of ſelfiſh vice no where appeared to obſcure the glowing picture; for even in the moment when her innocence was about to experience the ingratitude and caprice of thoſe ſhe loved, and the deep deception and black enormity of others to whom that innocence was known, her unapprehenſive ſpirit felt no alarm, nor could ſhe conceive a human being capable of thoſe vices which her own ingenuous ſoul ſcarce knew by name.—"Oh Ignorance!" ſhe cried, throwing aſide Lady Aveline's letter, "why—why didſt thou withdraw

thy darkening veil, and unfold to theſe eyes the ſad verſatility of human nature?" Again ſhe took up the letter, and peruſed it with anguiſh indeſcribable.

Lady Aveline expreſſed herſelf extremely ſorry indeed for the good old Mr. Wallingford's death; he had been every way reſpectable, and by Benigna to be particularly lamented. She would certainly have requeſted her Benigna's ſociety immediately, but knew her averſion to gaiety and diſſipation; therefore would deny herſelf the pleaſure till the return of ſpring, when ſhe ſhould accompany them to Aveline Park: juſt at that period a reſidence in her family would be particularly unpleaſant, as Miſs Llangreville was a viſitor, and probably would continue ſo until her nuptials with her former ſwain took place. She deſired, if ſhe wanted any pecuniary aſſiſtance, to ſend for it; and hoped, as ſhe was fond of retirement, and of a contemplative humor, that Ruthinglenne would not be inſupportable till the period ſhe had mentioned; then con-

concluded with all former affection, her dear Benigna's very ſincere friend,

E. A.

CHAP. VIII.

"HOW I loved her!" exclaimed Benigna, wiping the tears of bitterneſs from her burning cheeks, "how pure, how fervid and ſincere was my regard! But it is ſpurned, caſt back upon my heart, and I will beſtow it on a butterfly," ſhe added, proudly, "rather than obtrude it where unwelcome and unreturned!"

A noble ardor of heart, and a certain ſentiment which might be denominated the juſtifiable pride of a principled mind, characterized Benigna, which blending together, produced a dignity that diſtinguiſhed her

in all conditions; and it now ſupported her under the indifference of her deareſt friend, and the diſappointment, or at leaſt the retardment of her moſt anxious hopes, through the mean malevolence of Mr. and Mrs. Donnellan.

The tumult and mortification theſe letters occaſioned had ſcarcely ſubſided, nor had ſhe given her future deſtiny the conſideration of one ſerious moment, when a circumſtance occurred that enveloped every faculty in joy and wonder, and totally excluded all other objects from her mind.

One evening that the ſtormy blaſts of December blew loud and ſhrill through the ivied cloiſters of the Priory, and the rain, driven by the riſing guſts, blattered on the Gothic caſements, Benigna had ſeated herſelf penſively by a cheerful fire:—ſhe had read a conſiderable time, but not feeling much intereſt in her author, ſhe threw aſide the book, and taking her crayons, had nearly finiſhed an intereſting portrait of Crazy Jane, when Old Timothy entered the room,

room, saying, "There is company come, Miss."

"Company to me, Timothy! Do you not know them?"

Timothy had no time to reply. A lady in deep mourning, attended by a gentleman in the same sable attire, rushed forward; and while Dorothy, quick as the weight of years, and pressure of infirmities would allow, followed, the Lady eagerly clasped Benigna in a fervent embrace, and crying, "My child!" fell senseless with her to the floor.

Benigna had heard her exclamation: the words "My child!" had reached her heart; and returning the stranger's pressure with a convulsive energy, could only articulate. "My mother!"

Dorothy, while chilling doubts were contracting every furrowed feature, continued to gaze through her spectacles on the prostrate pair; and having exerted all her feeble strength to raise and restore them to animation, in the most petrifying accents she addressed the mother.

"You be strangely altered, Madam,"

cried the old woman, preſſing between her and Benigna; "good faith and troth you be, ſince I gave firſt this pretty bloſſom to your arms! But eighteen years, and the ſmall-pox, ſure enough, will take away the roſieſt cheeks, and the ſmootheſt ſkin; but, as neither years nor ſmall-pox can take away mother-marks, by your leave I muſt examine here."

As ſhe ſpoke, with more eagerneſs than reſpect, ſhe attempted to puſh up the ſleeve of the ſtranger's peliſſe, who, offended at ſuch preſuming freedom in a domeſtic, would have haughtily repulſed her; but Benigna, in mild beſeeching accents, entreated her forbearance; "For," added the trembling agitated girl, "Dorothy means ſo well, and ſuckled my father, and nurſed me, and—and—and——

While Benigna ſpoke, her old attendant was ſatisfied; ſhe had completed her purpoſe, and interrupted her apology.

Near eighteen long years had elapſed ſince Dorothy attended the lady her dear Benignus

Benignus had brought to the Priory; and during the pangs which gave Benigna exiſtence, ſhe, with peering eyes, had obſerved a mulberry a little way above the lady's elbow: ſhe noticed it, marked it with more than common attention, determined in her own ſagacious mind that, ſhould myſtery continue to involve the union, that mulberry ſhould identify the mother, ſhould every thing elſe fail. Now this mother-mark, as Dorothy called it, was viſible, evident on the ſtranger's arm; and was no ſooner diſcovered by her, than, turning to Benigna, ſhe bade her kneel for a bleſſing, for, indeed, her mother had at laſt come for her.

"Yes," repeated the lady, "come to claim, to love, and to protect my charming child—the image of my Fitzalbert—the orphan of my heart! Oh Benignus, Benignus! look down on thy widowed Elizabeth, and——"

"Her name, ſure enough!" interrupted Dorothy unceremoniouſly,—"Yet I once

thought——but I will go and ſee about ſupper:—you and Miſs will have enough to ſay."

Away then went the worthy old attached domeſtic, rejoicing that her ſweet Miſs had found a mother, yet brooding over ſecret diſcontent, and caſting looks of what ſhe called her ill-will towards the tall auſtere companion of the lady.

This gentleman was introduced to Benigna as her uncle-in-law; and on her expreſſing an ardent deſire to hear the ſad eventful hiſtory which united and diſunited her venerated parents, the lady commenced the little narrative that will appear in the following chapter.

CHAP.

CHAP. IX.

"YOU was the child of love, the offſpring of misfortune, my dear girl," ſaid the mother of Benigna. "I am the daughter of an opulent merchant, who reſided nineteen years ago in the City of Dublin:—he had once failed in buſineſs; but, on having his affairs retrieved by the generoſity of a younger brother, he grew proſperous and rich, and as his wealth increaſed, gratitude, to its origin influenced every thought and action of his future days.

"My father married a woman of ſplendid fortune, and much elegance of perſon; but dying when I was born, I was reared with

the care and indulgence uſually the portion of an only child;—it was my fatal deſtiny from my earlieſt years, to intereſt and attach the heart of my couſin, the eldeſt ſon of this beloved brother, and at an early age I was ordered to conſider Patrick O'Connant as my future huſband.

"My nature ever ſpurned compulſion; and having been rendered ſtill more obſtinate by unlimited indulgence, revolted from the impoſed treaty, and for a length of time I reſiſted both threats and perſuaſions. In a little time my health began to wear an alarming appearance, and Patrick O'Connant, who ſincerely loved me, and delighted to prevent my very wiſhes, on the Faculty preſcribing change of air, and the Wells of Scarborough in Yorkſhire, with much reluctance my father allowed me to accompany a family of my acquaintance on a viſit to England.

"Some little time before our embarkation for this country, fate introduced me at one of the Caſtle balls to your beloved father, my

my early loſt Fitzalbert. 'He came, he ſaw, he conquered.'

"Our love mutually triumphed over all the claims of duty—all the ties of kindred; and before we left Dublin, we were legally, though with the utmoſt ſecrecy, united at St. Peter's Church.

"Various circumſtances for a conſiderable time retarded our journey, and I apprehended the conſequences of our attachment would have diſcovered our union.

"At length, however, we ſet out. Benignus obtained leave of abſence, and followed, and I was the happieſt of human beings till the time drew near that was to give my child exiſtence. My father and Patrick O'Connant, were daily expected in England. I trembled with apprehenſions; anxiety accelerated the painful hour; and in deſperation, even while the pangs of agony were rending my frame, I was attended to the father of my huſband in this Priory; here you was born—here you was left.

"Two days after our return to Scarborough, my father and Patrick O'Connant arrived, I was confined to bed; but my marriage never being ſuſpected, neither did my illneſs create ſuſpicion, and I was therefore attended with kindneſs and care.

"Benignus had rejoined his regiment ſome time; and after our excurſion through the wilds of Yorkſhire, we were embarking for Ireland at Liverpool, when the fatal intelligence reached me that Enſign Fitzalbert had fallen in a duel with Colonel Heberden:—the cauſe of quarrel could never be diſcovered, but that intereſted not me; he I loved was loſt, and I had nothing to hope, and nothing to fear. Time at length compoſed thoſe griefs which, cruel neceſſity obliging me to diſſemble, ſunk into gloomy melancholy. My father was urgent and impatient—my lover ſtill importunate and fond; and in a ſhort time the widow of your father became the wife of Patrick O'Connant. He indeed loved me, but his love was the origin of my miſery: he grew

jealous

jealous and ſuſpicious; and having three daughters and no ſon, his diſcontent and ill-humor filled up the meaſure of my wretchedneſs. I ſometimes found opportunity to caſually enquire, and heard of you; but, alas! never durſt attempt more.

"It is now ſix weeks ſince poor Mr. O'Connant died. His daughters are left with ample fortunes; his widow, ſo little pleaſure did her joyleſs heart yield him during life, left with a bare ſubſiſtence; and even that depends as yet on the glorious uncertainty of our laws: yet I could not await its tardy deciſion to claſp my own, my lovely child to this fond maternal boſom. I ſeek the ſhelter of her love, the ſupport of her duty, and the comfort of her ſociety; ſhe ſhall ſhare my all when it is recovered, and in the meantime I will ſhare her ſolitude."

"My deareſt mother, all I have is your's," ſaid Benigna, dropping on her knees, and kiſſing her hands with filial reſpect; "all my powers ſhall be exerted to ſooth and ſupport you:—and this," ſhe added, taking

taking a pocket-book from her little writing-table, which contained the ſecurities for the eight hundred pounds bequeathed her by her benefactor, "this, my beloved parent, ſhall ſupply your wants until juſtice renders you your own: I am too happy in conſidering myſelf your dependant."

Mrs. O'Connant received the pocket-book, ſlightly examined its value, and then careleſsly put it in her pocket, ſaying, "This, my dear, my generous girl, ſhall ſoon be reſtored to you, with the intereſt ſuch nobleneſs of ſpirit deſerves——

"But thou art the child of Fitzalbert!" ſhe cried in ecſtacy; "and why ſhould I delay a moment giving you the pleaſure ſo highly your deſert? No, my child, I am not poor, not dependant; ten thouſand pounds ſhall be your fortune, a ſplendid reſidence and equipage, and the affection of three lovely ſiſters all court your acceptance. I am ſettled in London, and there my Benigna ſhall ſhine, and gladden all thoſe who ſurvive that have watched her helpleſs infancy,

infancy, and ſupplied the wants of her deſerted youth and hitherto forlorn condition."

That Benigna rejoiced in the happy reverſe of her ſituation, is undeniable; ſhe had found, ſhe was claimed by an affectionate mother, rich in the means to gratify all her wiſhes, to give her a diſtinction in ſociety, and a conſequence in herſelf;—ſtill a ſentiment pervaded her boſom on ſurveying that mother, vague and indefinable; it rendered her pleaſure imperfect—her ſatisfaction incomplete: ſome nameleſs duty—a craving void—an aching ſenſation—a ſomething unpoſſeſſed, it was all a negative, yet imparted an alloy that imbittered every ſmiling enjoyment, and feelingly proclaimed, "Still, ſtill Benigna is unhappy."—But this involuntary inclination, to be ungrateful both to her Creator and parent, ſhe not only repreſſed, but endeavoured to ſubdue; and as the deſcribing of happineſs ſometimes heightens it on the imagination, ſhe devoted the firſt day after her mother's arrival to writing to her beloved benefactreſs, and gave a

full account of all that had occurred since her departure.

" I am interested, and must still be interesting to my Euphemia," said she, in the spirit of reviving tenderness; and full of the hope, notwithstanding her late capricious neglect, she addressed Lady Aveline. " Past unkindness shall no more corrode my remembrance, beloved friend and sister of my heart," said she; " I am my mother's, but I more am your's: but she cast me off—rejected me—no matter, it is my place!" and every thing, however unimportant it might be considered, Benigna related. She had been early taught that the failure of duty in one, by no means justified or sanctioned it in another; and with that sentiment influencing her mind, in modest, fond, and respectful terms, she announced the alteration of her fortune and prospects to Lady Aveline.

CHAP.

CHAP. X.

MRS. O'Connant ſtill poſſeſſed the viſible remains of beauty, though marked with a ſtronger and more decided character than the mild impreſſive features of her daughter. Her eyes were large and dark, and gave animation to a countenance which acquired an air of emboldened ſuperiority from a pair of high-arched brows; her figure was tall and full, and rather majeſtic; ſhe ſeemed perfectly acquainted with all the unembarraſſed uſages of faſhionable life; and there was a high haughty freedom, blending with what the French would term *fierté*, in her manner, which abaſhed the humble, and repulſed

repulſed the meek; while it provoked the irritable, and diſguſted the perfectly well-bred. Her feelings appeared quick, her paſſions violent, and the properties of her mind were of that daring temper which rather proudly defied the power, than gently entreated the protection of man. Her ſpirits in general were high, and her humor gay; yet ſometimes a ſullen gloom would ſteal over her features, and render her dark, reſerved, and melancholy.

Benigna contemplated her character and manners with an aſtoniſhment not unblended with fear; and ſhrunk alike from an imperiouſneſs which was termed dignity, and intended to impreſs the mind with ideas of reſpect and awe, and an enervating levity meant to inſpire confidence, and encourage affection. Neither were congenial with the pure and fervid feelings of Benigna, whoſe gentle ſpirit ſtill more revolted from the rude, boiſterous, and vulgar manners of her brother-in-law, Mr. John O'Connant.

At times, when her natural openneſs could

no

no longer reſtrain the diſguſt he excited, her mother would kiſs her, and ſmilingly tell her it was the honeſt, blunt frankneſs of the Hibernian character; he would ſoon have her eſteem, if not her admiration.—"Your brother, my dear Madam," the perſiſtive Benigna would reply, "ſhall always have my reſpect; but while I can diſtinguiſh the appearance from realities, Mr. O'Connant can never excite my eſteem."

Our poor heroine had cheriſhed a hope that Lady Aveline would have anſwered her letter with congratulations on being reſtored to maternal care; and the unreſtrained tears of bitterneſs were falling faſt down her cheeks for ſuch a proof of diſdainful contempt, when a carriage with four foaming horſes, drove violently round the Priory, and in a moment after Benigna was encircled in the arms of Lord Ruthinglenne.

"Benigna! my angel, my betrothed, my plighted angel!" he cried, gaſping from the vehemence of a fervid and impaſſioned nature—"now, now thou art my own for ever!

ever! What can—what ſhall impede us now?" A recollection intruded; he ſtarted from the palpitating boſom of her he loved, ſo fondly worſhipped; and turning with graceful deference to Mrs. O'Connant, announced himſelf as Lord Caſtledownne's ſon, and implored her to ratify a treaty which only wanted her ſanction to unite two congenial hearts, and complete their perpetual felicity.

"To every excellence that can dignify the female character, this lovely creature, Madam," ſaid his Lordſhip, "added filial reverence even for a parent unknown, and firmly refuſed to bleſs me with her hand until preſented by a mother, or till aſſured no ſuch endearing relative exiſted. Now, then, be gracious, and reward the tender ſentiment which from infancy has been our mutual hope."

The impaſſioned ardor of his heart diffuſed a brilliant glow over his manly features; his eyes ſparkled with anticipated delight,

delight, and with trembling impatience he awaited the aſtoniſhed mother's reply.

" So noble an alliance for my daughter," ſaid Mrs. O'Connant, after a reflective pauſe, " as Lord Caſtledownne's heir, would certainly gratify every maternal wiſh, and anſwer every ardent prayer for the orphan of my heart; but can I reward your parent's protection of her helpleſſneſs by clandeſtinely uniting her with their only ſon? And more, your Lordſhip is a minor; nor has Benigna teſtified her own approbation of ſuch a meaſure, and ſhe ſhall never find an impoſing tyrant where ſhe diſcovered a mother."

" I only am amenable to my parents," interrupted his Lordſhip, with increaſing vehemence, and anxious to remove every difficulty at once, " I only am amenable to them: modeſty holds my Benigna ſilent. I can eaſily obviate my minority, and fear not, deareſt Madam," he added, the generous impulſe giving energy to his manner— " fear not, I value the poſſeſſion too highly; it is too precious to my ſoul not to have the rite

rite that binds her mine ſecure; all ſhall be ſolemn, regular, valid. Oh ſpeak, Benigna!" he continued, wringing her hands with beating apprehenſive rapture, "Oh ſpeak! confirm my bliſs—aſſure your mother——"

He ceaſed, for ſtrong and incontrollable ſenſations ſuſpended further utterance; and he looked as if nature was enduring its laſt convulſive ſtruggle.

The countenance of Benigna was pale as the ſhadow of death; the beam of her ſoft eye glared languid; her innocent heart beat low; her blood ran chill, and her ſpirits receded as he ſpoke.

"My own, my ſweet Benigna!" ſaid her mother, "I live but to promote your wiſhes—only ſpeak them."

A long pauſe enſued—a few tears ſoftened the painful conflict—a delicate glow tinged her pallid features; and while a faint flutter of the heart announced returning animation, in weakened accents ſhe anſwered her anxious mother.

"My

"My wiſhes," ſaid ſhe, an uneaſy conſciouſneſs heightening the color in her cheek, "are avowedly for Lord Ruthinglenne's felicity; but how to advance that without derogating from his honor, and infringing on ſelf-impoſed duties and reſtrictions, I know not. A generous affection, a hallowed obedience, with a pure and virtuous heart, are all I have to give. The Earl of Caſtlędownne's heir is entitled, ought to ſecure much, much more ſplendid advantages: and though I did once yield a ſtrange equivocal conſent to give myſelf from a mother's hand, I ſhould feel more ſatisfied if ——"

"No *ifs*, Benigna," interrupted the impetuous lover, repreſſing his natural violence—"no *ifs*—no objections; happineſs, my virtuous, my enchanting girl, is my only aim, is my only ambition. I have no expenſive pleaſures to gratify,—my taſte is retired, and my nature domeſtic: in my name you will poſſeſs thoſe diſtinctions which give conſequence to ſociety, and in you, and in your virtues,

virtues, I ſhall poſſeſs all that elevates humanity, and receives brilliancy from Heaven.—Without you, Benigna, the world would be a void; I ſhould be loſt to all the higher purpoſes of exiſtence, loſt to my parents, and loſt to myſelf:—I cannot live—I ſhould preſume—I will not live without you, Benigna!"

A ſtrange ſenſe of ſomething feared, yet unexpected, forbade Benigna to reject, or reſiſt him, and yet ſhe wiſhed not to accede. She ſat ſilent; ſaddened images flitted inconnectedly through her brain, and pale fear painted her lovely face. Lord Ruthinglenne gazed upon her, was no way inſenſible to her irreſolution; his miſery was mute—his anguiſh extreme, and his tortured ſpirit was riſing to the frenzy of ſome dark and deep determination, when poor Benigna took his cold convulſed hand, and preſſed it with a pitying tenderneſs to her own aching heart. She was the ſpring of every thought;—his looks then gradually ſoftened; a vital warmth diffuſed itſelf through his ſhivering frame;

frame; and leaning his head on her arm, he whiſpered, "Are you mine?" A ſickening terror of ſoul, to which no name can be given, overwhelmed her as ſhe replied, "Ought I—Oh Auguſtus! ought I?"

He held her in a chaſte, yet ardent embrace—breathed the pureſt vows of honor and eternal love;—her reſiſtance became every moment fainter and fainter—her enraptured lover more fond, more fervid, and importunate: her heart fluttered—her cheeks glowed—a ſoftened warmth dilated her trembling yielding boſom; Ruthinglenne would not be denied—Benigna could not refuſe;—ſhe conſented, promiſed, vowed, as ſoon as the banns could be publiſhed, in three weeks at the ancient altar of the Priory, to receive the holy benediction, and become the wife of Auguſtus, Lord of Ruthinglenne.

CHAP. XI.

WHEN Sir Anſtruther Buckingham quitted the Caſtle, it was in the torturing perſuaſion that Benigna was tenderly attached to Lord Ruthinglenne, and with indignant determination he reſolved to forget her, and all the wondrous enchantment that hung around her modeſt form. Entirely releaſed from every engagement with the haughty heireſs before his departure, in a moment when impaſſioned hope beat high, and the remembrance of her doubtful manner ſunk deep, he had reſolved to mention his ardent wiſhes to Lord and Lady Caſtledownne: but

but Benigna's fatal " I fear the day is far diſtant !" deſtroyed the fairy fabric Love had erected, diſſolved the ſhining vapors of new-born hope, and reduced his viſionary bliſsful proſpects to the imbittered poſſeſſion of ſolid miſery.

Precipitancy is the property of lovers, dangerous in its tendency, fatal in its effects. Had the indignant, impetuous pang her miſconſtrued words occaſioned, allowed one moment's explanation, Benigna would have added a mother, and not a lover, occupied her thoughts, and excited the " I fear the day is far diſtant !"

On his arrival in town, he ſecluded himſelf from all he knew. The brilliancy of idea, the energy of action which had hitherto diſtinguiſhed his character, yielded to a gloomy diſſatisfied torpor, and uſeleſs inanity of being: yet, notwithſtanding this, when the Earl and Counteſs of Caſtledowne arrived, he waited on them, and before their embarkation, promiſed to be the viſitor of Lady Aveline.

By various pretexts Lord Ruthinglenne delayed ſetting out on his tour before his parents left England; and though he wiſhed not to openly oppoſe and bid defiance to their wiſhes, nothing was more remote from his intention than to leave Britain until Benigna was legally his own. Perfectly informed that ſhe was to correſpond with his ſiſter, he daily hovered about the dwelling of Lord Aveline. Unacquainted with his ſecret motives, his father began to hope that Prudence was taking her turn to reign, and inducing him to cultivate the favor, and, ſecure the hand of his wealthy couſin; and, influenced by this notion, his Lordſhip readily accepted the various excuſes he offered for protracting his ſtay in England; but his mother, more penetrating, and better ſkilled in the arcana of a mind in love, manifeſted the moſt unequivocal diſpleaſure at his futile delays; and one morning that he perſiſted with his uſual obſtinacy, ſhe told him, nothing but improper deſigns on Benigna Fitzalbert could poſſibly detain him.

"She

"She will encourage no *improper* deſigns, Madam," retorted he, haughtily, and with emphaſis.

"She muſt be ſubjected to none," interpoſed the Earl; "I have converſed with her," he continued, "and Benigna will not marry till ſhe finds her mother."

"Her mother!" repeated the Counteſs, with a look ſtrangely piercing, "has your Lordſhip any knowledge of her mother—had you ever any?"

"Benigna is not mine," reſumed the Earl, gravely, with his eyes fixed on the face of his wife, as if to penetrate her thoughts—"no, ſhe is not mine; and yet her mother was precious to my heart."

"Was!" interrupted Lord Ruthinglenne with tremulous impatience, "was! then you knew her, and ſhe is dead?"

"It concerns Miſs Fitzalbert alone," replied his father with a moſt repulſive frown; and retreating into the depth of gloomy thought, he in a moment after quitted the apartment.

This was the laſt converſation theſe illuſ-

trious perſonages had concerning the obſcure Benigna, though Lord Ruthinglenne retired to addreſs her, the Counteſs to ruminate on her and the ambiguous demeanor of the Earl, who, when alone, prayed her all poſſible felicity.

The Earl and Counteſs had croſſed the tropic with the moſt auſpicious gales, and ſtill their ſon lingered in town, and ſtill being a frequent viſitor at his ſiſter's, though neither word nor look could ſanction ſuch a hope, encouraged the wiſhes of Miſs Llangreville.

On Mr. Wallingford's death he would have haſtened to the Priory; but Benigna, from motives of delicacy and propriety, concealed how ſad and heavy were her hours, and how lonely and comfortleſs her condition: and while her pride and wounded feelings carefully ſuppreſſed Lady Aveline's cold and mortifying neglect, ſhe firmly interdicted his coming to the Priory. He was very anxious to peruſe, and entreated to have Benigna's letter, announcing Mr. Wallingford's

Wallingford's death; but Lady Avelinewith perfect truth, and a careleſſneſs which the generous-hearted brother properly reſented, ſaid, "ſhe did not know what ſhe had done with it;" adding, "but it was in the uſual hum-drum ſtyle, expatiating on ſolitude and death, and the beneficial effects of ſober reflection."

"Then I hope your Ladyſhip will profit by the leſſon," ſaid Lord Ruthinglenne, with an unuſual expreſſion of countenance.

"Oh dear, no!" cried her Ladyſhip, with eaſy *nonchalance*; "it would be ungenerous to accept what may be ſo uſeful to herſelf. I am not in a humor for croſs-bones and a ſcull juſt yet."

Her brother turned from her with diſguſt.

"Poor Benigna!" ſaid he, mentally, "one by one of all thy friends drop off, and leave thy gentleneſs to buffet with the worſt that fate may bring; but I will never leave thee, nor forſake thee!"

Lord Ruthinglenne, at his brother-in-

law's requeſt, was an inmate of the houſe during the viſit his Lordſhip paid to his ſick relation: yet he ſeldom partook of the ſplendid gaieties which revelled within the manſion; nor, though gay, young, faſhionable, and volatile himſelf, did he approve, or attend his ſiſter through the maze of diſſipation in which ſhe delighted to flutter, cauſing, like the flaming meteor, the wonder and admiration of the moment in which her blazing movements were ſeen.

Her Ladyſhip and Miſs Llangreville had one evening gone to a maſked ball with Lady Daſhington. Lord Ruthinglenne had been invited; but abſorbed in meditation, doubt, and various perplexities how he ought, how he could proceed reſpecting the poor ſolitary of Ruthinglenne, he declined attending the feſtive ſcene, and devoted the hours to writing to Benigna, in her Ladyſhip's *boudoir*: he had concluded a tender ſcrawl, fondly expreſſive of all the ſhrinking doubts, timid fears, and aſpiring wiſhes of an ardent impaſſioned mind, when his eyes, which

which had been for ſome time inſenſibly fixed on the table, which was covered with papers, cards, and unintereſting letters, were attracted by one unopened, that her Ladyſhip, in the delightful hurry of the toilet, ſcarce remembered, if ſhe noticed it, being laid before her.

How often is it found in the operations of human nature, that what man, misjudging man conceives accident, is deciſive in its effects in the grand computation of human happineſs, and human miſery! Fear not, too anxious worldlings! He who formed a ſphere in which the creatures of a moment move, muſt watch and muſt direct their motions; nor can the hand of *chance* be traced in any of the various ways of univerſal order.

The characters of the letter, which now rivetted the eyes of Lord Ruthinglenne, could not be miſtaken; he ſtarted from his chair, and ſeized the letter.—"No!" he cried, gazing enraptured on it, "no! I

cannot be miſtaken; a ſympathetic charm dwells in the very touch of her ſoft finger, that muſt for ever influence my ſoul. Poor Benigna!" he continued, ſoliloquizing, while a diſintereſted glow, unblended with the throbs of paſſion, heightened the crimſon of his cheek, "poor forgotten Benigna! who knows what modeſt requeſt this unheeded paper may contain? Deſolate, friendleſs, helpleſs, and alone, perhaps expoſed, inſulted—I cannot bear my thoughts!—Punctilious honor might throw this aſide," he continued, heſitating,—"return it to the cold neglect from which I took it. I betray no truſt—break no confidence: my ſiſter deſerts her—her brother ſhall protect her!"

He broke the ſeal; his eye impatiently traced the words, to which an agitated heart and trembling fingers had given but imperfect forms, yet they operated like electricity on every nerve. His pulſe beat high, his boſom throbbed; and almoſt breathleſs, gaſping,

ing, he cried inarticulately, "Her mother! She now is mine! Precious harbinger of bliſs! Oh ecſtatic! ſhe is mine!" and without communicating the intelligence, that Benigna's mother had claimed her (which this letter announced), he flew from the houſe, and ſwift as four of the fleeteſt courſers could draw him, ſet out for the Priory: and on his arrival, with all the abrupt and fervid impetuoſity of his nature, and the wild diſorder already related, he preſented his claims, and demanded the affianced hand of the ever-loved Benigna.

CHAP. XII.

NOTHING any way material occurred at the Priory during the intermediate time. The three weeks, neceſſary for the publication of the banns, elapſed, the licence was procured, and all was in readineſs;—next morning was to unite the fond impatient lover to his modeſt gentle Benigna; after which the whole party was to ſet out for the metropolis, in their way to a little romantic *cottage ornée*, near Kingſton, which his Lordſhip had ordered to be prepared with all imaginable taſte for his adored bride.

Lord Ruthinglenne had been gazing on Benigna a conſiderable time, who, ſeated in a muſing,

a muſing, and rather melancholy poſture, ſeemed buried in the depth of ſolemn thought.

"Why ſo penſive, my Benigna?" ſaid his Lordſhip;—"why are not your anticipations glowing, bliſsful as mine?"

"I am not naturally ſo ſanguine," ſhe replied, a ſigh accompanying her words; "but my thoughts juſt now were particularly ſolemn and ſerious. I was thinking," and again ſhe ſighed—"I was thinking, as I may never more reviſit theſe beloved ſhades—never kneel again at that altar, where to-morrow we ſhall ſtand—never again weep over the relics of thoſe who owned and loved me when inconſcious of the bleſſing, I think it would ſanctify my feelings, impart a holy ardor to my future duties, and remove a painful weight that preſſes at my heart, if once again, even over his aſhes, I were to invoke the heavenly benediction of my late beloved benefactor."

His Lordſhip remonſtrated againſt the gloomy intention on the eve of marriage.—"I cannot allow it, my lovely trembler; it will

will only increaſe a melancholy that now enfrenzies me; think not of it—turn to more brilliant ſcenes—to brighter ideas—to love and bliſs."

"Indeed, Auguſtus, it will compoſe me—only can diſpel the heavy, dark imaginings that chill my every better hope with apprehenſive dread."

"You feel but the ſhrinkings of modeſty, believe me, Benigna; and your gentle mind, too long inured to ſcenes of melancholy, has acquired a *ſombre* ſhade, which the fervid attentions of an adoring huſband ſhall ſoon ſerene, and brighten into joy."

"I cannot reſt," ſaid Benigna, perſevering, "I muſt drop a parting tear on the tomb of my friend. "I—I—indeed, dear Ruthinglenne, I muſt be indulged!"

"Be it ſo then," at length reluctantly aſſented his Lordſhip; "it is a ſorry indulgence, but I ſhall ſhare it—you ſhall not go alone."

Benigna now appeared gratified—ſhe felt eaſy; and the keys of a private door leading

through the chapel to the vaults of the Priory, being delivered to her by the houſe-keeper of the Caſtle, ſhe reſolved on her ſolemn viſit as ſoon as the evening ſervice was over in the chapel.

"And do you really leave us to-morrow, Miſs?" demanded the old houſekeeper, anxiouſly,—"really marry Lord Ruthinglenne?"

"I believe ſo," replied Benigna, faintly ſmiling; "have you any objection, my good Mrs. Emmerſon?"

"The Lord prevent it!" returned the poor woman, her face growing pale, and her voice weak; "I have been told it was to be, but did not believe it: the Lord prevent it till—till——" a moment ſhe ceaſed; but quickly added, "till the Earl gives his conſent."

"I had the Earl's conſent," replied Benigna, her countenance brightening with the recollection, and amiably willing to quiet the good domeſtic's apparent apprehenſions—"I had indeed."

"And

"And her Ladyſhip's too, Miſs?"

"Not exactly, Mrs. Emmerſon; but her words implied what I now obey."

"Imply! imply!" repeated the thoughtful Mrs. Emmerſon, as if doubtful of the meaning.

"Allow me," interrupted Benigna, anxiouſly, "to explain; her Ladyſhip hinted I might marry Lord Ruthinglenne when I diſcovered my mother; ſtill I would delay the ceremony, but his Lordſhip is——"

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Mrs. Emmerſon, after a pauſe for breath to ſpeak—"good Heaven! your mother,—what can ſhe do?—Wait till you ſee the Earl!"

"You are myſterious, and congeal my blood!" ſaid Benigna, gaſping; "your words ſink prophetic on my heart, yet I cannot recede—cannot retract; any pretext or excuſe now, would whirl his impetuous nature to a degree of deſperation, which might produce more fatal effects than even our union, inauſpicious as I fear it will prove; but I am driven on my fate, and conſtrained

conſtrained againſt my better judgment, and therefore can only reſign the iſſue to a higher, mightier Power."

The heart of Mrs. Emmerſon ſeemed big, labouring with ſome unuttered weight, which, perhaps, might have broke from its painful reſtraint, but that, at the very moment her pallid lips uncloſed to ſpeak, Lord Ruthinglenne entered the apartment, and taking the hand of Benigna, they ſet out on their melancholy errand.

As they proceeded round the Priory to the centre gate of the Gothic chapel, Benigna repeated the ſtrange, unconnected, diſſuaſive words of Mrs. Emmerſon.

"Her motives for the preſumption are the only apology my nature could accept," replied his Lordſhip, with the haughty negligence he felt; "thoſe of her condition conceive no evil ſo terrible as the diſpleaſure of ſuperiors; and probably ſhe fears being on the ſpot, that *en paſſant* reprehenſion may deſcend even to herſelf when the matter is canvaſſed;

canvaſſed; but I will enſure the poor ſoul from blame."

"I hope ſhe has no ſecret cauſe——"

"Confuſion to her babbling!" interrupted his Lordſhip, with his uſual angry impatience; "do you imagine ſhe entertains a familiar to reveal more of my father and mother's thoughts to her, than we know ourſelves?"

"I am ſerious, Auguſtus!"

"I know it, Benigna, and therefore would diſſuade you from your purpoſe; why add to that ſerioufneſs by the melancholy ceremony of giving a precious tear to what is inconſcious of the tribute?"

"We do not know that the ſpirit is inconſcious to what paſſes here."

"My ſweet enthuſiaſtic love," cried his Lordſhip, gaily, while he threw his arms round her waiſt, "to-morrow will ſwell my obligation ſo high to the preacher, that ever after, as a teſtimony of gratitude, I mean regularly to attend his lectures, and then, perhaps, I may be enabled to diſpute on the

the attributes and agency of ſpiritual beings."

A ſigh broke from Benigna's boſom; and, ſilent, ſad, and deeply reflective, ſhe purſued her purpoſe.

CHAP. XIII.

IT was an evening in December;—there was a moon, but low heavy clouds nearly obſcured every beam;—the air was mild, humid, and gloomy; there was a melancholy ſtillneſs, an oppreſſive warmth in the night, which ſaddened the heart with a fearful, boding heavineſs.

Lord Ruthinglenne carried a taper in one hand, and the ponderous keys which opened on the dead, in the other; while Benigna, trembling and apprehenſive, hung on his arm

arm for ſupport. The ravages of time had long diſunited the chapel and vaults from the habitable part of the Priory; and as they cautiouſly proceeded over the moſs-grown proſtrate pillars which once formed the ſolemn cloiſters of the venerable ſtructure, a cold melancholy ſhook the frame of Benigna: and though ſhe wiſhed to return, ſome impellent principle urged her to purſue her ſaddened purpoſe. They entered the chapel in ſilence; all there was quiet as the grave itſelf: there had been evening ſervice, and a few lights ſtill glimmered in the ſockets, diffuſing a pale dreary gleam over the ſinking ſhrines, and adding ſolemnity to the impreſſive ſcene.

They advanced down the centre aiſle, and from ſome involuntary motion, for an inſtant ſtopped at the altar. A low deſolating wind, in broken whiſpers, ſounded fearfully through the gloom, which excited a ſtrange ſenſation in both.—His Lordſhip ſpoke. Something like ſuperſtitiõ ſtill bound his bolder

bolder powers, while the impulſe to go on ſtrengthened in Benigna.

" Benigna," ſaid his Lordſhip, " ſome reſtleſs ſpirit ſurely haunts this ancient pile. Hark! is not that a groan?"

" No! no!" ſhe cried, preſſing forward, " the wind is up—no more."

" To-morrow," ſaid her companion, recovering ſomewhat from his momentary weakneſs, while exultation roſe upon thought, " to-morrow! Oh to-morrow!"

" To-morrow!" reſponded Benigna, dejectedly: the ſound was hollow; it ſtruck deepened on the ear of both, and reverberating echo, as it died along the mouldering walls of the ancient fabric, in mournful whiſpers ſeemed to ſay, " To-morrow!"—An awful reverence ſtole over the ſenſes of Lord Ruthinglenne, while Benigna, with the holy fervor of a pious ſpirit, mentally ſupplicated the protection of the glorious Being, in whoſe preſence ſhe ſtood.

" How ſolemn and how fearful is the ſilence around us!" ſaid ſhe.

" Rather

"Rather too awful," replied his Lordſhip, deeply impreſſed—"rather too awful: better return, Benigna."

"Oh no, I muſt go on!"

They pauſed, each occupied with ſerious thought. They proceeded; their ſteps were low;—they continued ſilent; when looking around, the lights ſtill quivered, and to their imagination reflected ſhadowy forms flitting through the gloomy aiſles. As they went on, they heard, or fancied they heard, a heavy ſtep, as if purſuing them.

"I hear——" whiſpered Benigna.

"Gracious God! let us retire," cried his Lordſhip, "before ſuperſtition uſurps the powers of reaſon!"

"This is the entrance to the vault," ſaid Benigna, unheedful of his remonſtrance, and impelled to go on;—"this is the entrance—the key?"

The door was opened by his Lordſhip, but his hand was not altogether ſteady; they entered the gloomy precincts, and holding

holding by each other, deſcended the few irregular ſteps which led to the vault.

The pent-up vapors for a moment ſuſpended reſpiration; and while an icy coldneſs pervaded the frame of Benigna, his Lordſhip ſhuddered from ſenſations ſtrange and uncommon;—he ſtill bore the taper, but the pale flame quivered dim in the vapid air, and the nails of the ſurrounding coffins, as they met the faintened gleam, threw forth a gloomy glare. The light was raiſed to inſpect the inſcription of the neareſt coffin, for Benigna remembered not the exact ſituation where Mr. Wallingford's was placed; and his Lordſhip's eyes were fixed upon the lackered plate of that which encloſed his hallowed remains, when Benigna, ſuddenly ſtarting, graſped his arm, and with a feeble ſhriek, fearfully exclaimed—"Look!"

"Look!" repeated his Lordſhip, raiſing his head, "where?"

At that moment a pale ſhadowy myſterious light gleamed around the vault.

"The lamps in the chapel," ſaid Benigna, inarticulately,

inarticulately, and clinging to Lord Ruthinglenne, "they ſurely—their feeble beams cannot penetrate this ſubterranean darkneſs!"

"No!" he replied, gazing eagerly, "no!"

"Is it the glare of our taper blending with the miſty vapours?"

"Impoſſible!"

At that inſtant it was indeed rendered impoſſible; for a looſe ſtone tripping the incautious foot of Lord Ruthinglenne, he ſtumbled, and the taper falling, was totally extinguiſhed; and they had been left in the darkneſs of death, but that the ſhadowy gleams ſtill threw its myſterious vapor around the awful ſcene.

The fortitude of Lord Ruthinglenne, from conſcious integrity, remained unappalled; yet ſtill a cold ſhivering ran through every circling vein, and a ſaddened boding ſhook his manly breaſt. A ſuſpenſive fear, a ſuperſtitious dread held Benigna mute; while a

heavy ſenſe of unexpected horror weighed down her palpitating heart.

"Benigna," ſaid his Lordſhip, in a deepened tone, "retire—deſiſt from your purpoſe, or let us return for a light."

"A light!" repeated ſhe, gazing fearfully around at the myſterious gleam, which rather brightened than faded on their aſtoniſhed ſight, "do we need a light?"

The hallowed urns glared in the ſhiny vapor, the coffins were viſible, and the plate on Mr. Wallingford's pre-eminent in brightneſs.

"I ſhall be maddened!—Benigna, go!"

Overwhelmed with terrors, ſudden as nameleſs, ſhe made the effort, but inſtantly uttered a faint ſhriek.

"God of heaven! I feel transfixed—I cannot move!"

As ſhe ſpoke, from ſome impulſive motion ſhe ſunk on her knees; and as her companion with involuntary awe knelt beſide her, ſomething vibratory from beneath ſhook the place around the proſtrate and

nearly petrified pair. The uncertain glare now gradually acquired a mild luminous brightneſs, and diffuſed a ſoftened radiancy over the melancholy vault;—they looked at each other in ſpeechleſs wonder; and during that ſilent intercourſe, a ſtrain, ſoft and melodious as the muſic of the ſpheres, broke in dulcet ſounds on their aſtoniſhed ſenſes:—it ceaſed—ſaddened ſighs filled up the awful pauſe, and again it ſwelled with grand and lofty melody; then ſinking into the ſofteſt cadence of angelic numbers, enwrapped their every faculty. Benigna, though entranced in awful wonder, felt more ſerene; a ſweet compoſure imperceptibly ſtole over every ſenſe; and while the pious fervor of her hallowed ſpirit gave a beautiful glow to her pale countenance, her mild eyes were raiſed with humility, her hands claſped in reverence; and with the devotion of a ſeraph, chaſtened by the humble awe of a weak dependant mortal, her adoring elevated ſoul breathed out a fervid prayer over the coffin of her departed friend.

"Oh

" Oh God of life! the ſupport of the feeble, the guide of the meek, the director of the virtuous!" ſhe cried, inſpired with more than human fortitude, " thou great and glorious Controller of the Univerſe, bend thy gracious eye on me, thy helpleſs creature!— ſanctify each purpoſe of a guiltleſs heart!— bleſs and hallow thoſe ſacred vows——"

She ceaſed from interruption; a heavy groan penetrated her appalled ear; the coffin of Mr. Wallingford appeared agitated: and as a ſudden blaze of reſplendent light burſt on her aſtoniſhed view, ſhe raiſed her eyes, when enſhrined in more than mortal brightneſs—more than human glory, ſtood the benign and gracious form of her lamented benefactor! Her ſight was dazzled—could not ſupport a radiancy ſuited only to the pure and bliſsful realms of impaſſive beings; and ſhe buried her face in the boſom of Lord Ruthinglenne, whoſe every faculty was wound up in frenzied horror.

" Benigna!" ſaid the ſpectre, in accents awfully deep, ſolemn, and impreſſive, yet

with a tone that never harmonized a mortal voice, "Benigna, turn—forbear—retreat!—thou ſhivereſt on the deadly brink of black deſpair!

"To ſave thy innocence—thy ſoul, a ſpirit burſts the barriers of eternity!

"Receive the viſitation, Oh thou daughter of that heart, which now lies cold and coffined in thy ſight! receive it, and avert the unending pang that fiends prepare thee in their drear abodes. Hark! they ſhriek! they bound in exultation moſt malign!

"One moment yet is thine!

"The kindlieſt angels, and the pureſt ſpirits will ſuſtain thee; while the ſpirit of the dead ſounds in thy ear—

"Wed not with Ruthinglenne!

"Wed not the ſon of Caſtledownne!"

The wretched enfrenzied youth himſelf heard no more; the wildneſs of dark deſpair ſeized his brain; and breathing a groan of agonized horror, his hands fell nerveleſs,

his eyes cloſed, every tortured ſenſe receded, and he ſunk lifeleſs on the humid ſtones.

Benigna, entranced in horror and in wonder, caſt a pitying glance on her inſenſible proſtrate lover, then raiſed her eyes to the awful appearance. A ſoft tumult, a ſolemn grateful reverence enveloped every feeling; and recollected love, and familiar intercourſe, for a moment prevailing over the natural apprehenſion of a ſuperhuman being, ſhe cried, in ecſtacy, "I ſee my benefactor!"

Again the muſic ſounded in grand and lofty peals through the gloomy vault; when gradually ſinking in mild ſeraphic melody, the voice once more filled up the pauſe with the tremendous interdiction—

"Wed not with Ruthinglenne!
"Wed not the ſon of Caſtledownne!
"He is——"

The voice ceaſed, as the howling guſts of a ruſhing tempeſt ſeemed to ſhake the ancient fabric to the centre.

Benigna, fearful, worked up to agony, left

till Mrs. Dorothy informed her that Benigna had gone with his Lordſhip to take leave of her old friends, and to pray that her new ones might be as good.

This information ſomewhat relieved the loud and turbulent ſorrow, and wild apprehenſions of the mother, who could not be entirely quieted till again ſhe preſſed her darling girl to her fond boſom.

Lord Ruthinglenne was carried inſenſible to bed, and in a few hours raged in the wild delirium of a brain fever. He raved continually of the ſpectre, his father, his wife Benigna; would mournfully beſeech her to cool the burning in his boſom, to aſſuage the agony in his head; and could never be ſoothed even into momentary calmneſs, but when ſhe reclined on the bed by him, ſuſtained his beating temples on her breaſt, and called him her own Auguſtus.

"Good ſpirits, bring peace!—Away—away with the evil!—What has my father done?—Who am I?—I will not be Ruthinglenne!—What is in a name?—Benigna ſhall

ſhall be mine !—The ſpectre ! the ſpectre !—ſee, it glides—it ſinks !—ſhe is loſt !—Oh this battle of the ſenſes ! I ſhall ſoon be one—and then, and then, Benigna——"

Liſtening to, and humoring theſe incoherencies, accompanied by the moſt endearing attentions, for ſeveral weeks occupied the time of Benigna. No one expected his Lordſhip to ſurvive; and his gentle nurſe, in the ſpirit of genuine affection, breathed but one prayer, which was to follow him, and never witneſs his mother's anguiſhed regrets for his early death.—But he was to live. Youth, a powerful mind, and an unbroken conſtitution, at length ſurmounted the frenzy of his fever, and abated the violence of his feelings; but even then he would lay for hours watching every varying turn of Benigna's intelligent face, enumerate her virtues, bleſs her ſweetneſs, and then ſighing in the bitterneſs of recollection, add, "But all are loſt:—all nothing, no nothing, to poor Ruthinglenne !"

When able to converſe on the ſubject,

they mutually agreed to bury all that had paſſed in the vault in the profoundeſt ſilence and ſecrecy, nor aſſign any reaſon for their nuptials being protracted, but that they were deferred for certain reaſons till the arrival of the Earl and Counteſs; then they themſelves hoped a myſtery would be elucidated, the horror of which had ſummoned even the ſleeping dead to realms of woe, and that entirely to the peace and ſatisfaction of all it might intereſt or concern.

With ſaddened, reſigned tenderneſs, and melancholy affection, they bade each other a long and painful farewel; his Lordſhip reſolving to ſet out for the Continent the moment he heard from his father, hoping that change of ſcene, and diverſity of objects, might ameliorate remembrance, and ſoften regret; while Benigna promiſed to remain at the Priory, if ſhe could, on any pretext, obtain her mother's conſent to ſuch a ſeclusion.

That Benigna Fitzalbert had never felt that fervor of attachment which Lord Ruthinglenne

Ruthinglenne wiſhed to inſpire, and that ſome believe neceſſary to make conjugal felicity complete, the reader is not to be told. She had rather been compelled by concurring circumſtances to conſent to become his wife, than influenced by any ſoft emotion of her heart; and now that the union had been ſo awfully interdicted, and he ceaſed either to importune her by entreaty, or intimidate her by violence, but for a ſuſpenſive dread of ſhe knew not what, an indiſtinct uncertain ſentiment, which repreſſed the ſoft flutterings of riſing hope, peace had redawned on her innocent mind, and anticipated pleaſures irradiated her blameleſs life. Retirement was her unheſitating, decided wiſh; and the quiet beloved ſolitude of Ruthinglenne, the choſen retreat, had ſhe been left to her own diſpoſal; but ſhe had now a parent, and though that parent's ſentiments in ſeveral points were uncongenial with her own, Benigna knew her duty, and reſolved to purſue it.

Lord Ruthinglenne had only quitted the

Priory a few days, when Mrs. O'Connant discovered a visible impatience to rejoin her family in town; and with undisguised indelicacy, if not unkindness, reproached Benigna for detaining her so long in a horrid old haunted ruin to see her married; and at last, for some fancy or vagary, which nobody forsooth was to know, break it off, and so good by to you after all the fuss and parade of asking and giving consent.—"Your sisters," added the lady, "would not have presumed so much on my lenity; but, indeed, their education was very different; their father soon bent them to obedience and humility."

"I hope, Madam, you will never find mine defective," replied Benigna, mildly; "I also experienced the care of a father, whose wisdom inculcated lessons which shall regulate every action of my future life."

"No doubt!" retorted her mother, with her colour heightening as she spoke—"no doubt in preference to mine."

"Fear not but they will be coincident with your own, my dear mother, for they were

were the fond counſels of a generous, pious, and virtuous heart, tending at once to eſtabliſh rectitude, and promote felicity."

"I wiſh the old man's praiſes were as ſilent as himſelf," rudely interpoſed her uncle, Mr. John; "for we hear of him, ſpeak of him, dream of him, and, by my ſoul, were it poſſible, we ſhould eat of him, I ſuppoſe."

"I regret, Sir, that the topic is unpleaſant," replied Benigna, indignantly, while remembered benefits and tenderneſſes imparted a grateful glow to her countenance; "I regret it, Sir, as to hear of his virtues is a tax all muſt ſubmit to who hear me ſpeak at all."

A ſmile of dark malign meaning haſtily paſſed over his rugged features as, leaving the room, he ſaid, "Indeed, Miſs, you give us fair warning, however."

There was a crafty ſullenneſs, blended with a low, mean reſerve, viſible in the manners of this newly-acquired ally, at which the ingenuous nature of Benigna revolted; and

and ſhe never ſurveyed the repulſive cunning of his hardened viſage, without an apprehenſive throb at her heart, ſo that ſhe at once feared, hated, and deſpiſed the brother-in-law of her mother.

Often ſhe caſt a tearful look towards the beloved towers of Ruthinglenne; and while her gentle heart ſwelled with gratitude to the gracious owners, ſhe ſighed out a fervent prayer that they might ſoon irradiate the demeſne with their cheering preſence and diffuſive beneficence.—"Oh happineſs! thou viſionary phantom!" ſhe would exclaim, "how haſt thou mocked my ardent aim—eluded my eager graſp!

"I prayed, Oh with what fervor, for my mother! From thy treaſury of mercies thou haſt given her—and am I happy?

"Oh bounteous Lord! take back my wiſhes, hopes, and prayers—they may bring me miſery; but thy omnipotence and wiſdom will vouchſafe me peace—peace preſent, and even eternal."

CHAP.

CHAP. XV.

BENIGNA was far from happy even in the ſheltering boſom of her mother. The amiable graces and elegant refinements of her highly-improved underſtanding ſhrunk, affrighted and diſguſted, from the ferocious rudeneſs of her uncle, while her delicate and intelligent mind ſickened at being conſtrained to endure in a mother (who every day relaxed in kindneſs, and exhibited unpropitious traits) the ſad reverſe of all ſhe had been accuſtomed to reverence, imitate, and love.

Mrs. O'Connant ſoon felt, or affected to feel, diſpleaſure at her daughter's reluctance to

to leave the Priory. She next aſſumed a haughty rigor on the occaſion, and in every word and look evinced the harſh authority with which ſhe intended to govern a heart that had been cheriſhed by kindneſs, and encouraged in its duties by love, and therefore only open to gentleneſs and meekneſs. "I cannot, indeed, leave Ruthinglenne," ſaid ſhe, with firmneſs, one evening, after being urged, nay, almoſt commanded, to prepare for her departure, "I cannot leave it till the Counteſs returns; much of my fate depends on her deciſion."

"On her's!" cried her mother, diſdainfully, "while I exiſt?"

"Her tenderneſs watched me, Madam, when by you I was forgotten or unheeded."

"Dare but to provoke or reproach me again," ſhe vociferated, the fire of anger darting from her eyes, and feeling the reply, "dare it but, and I ſhall ſtrike you to the earth!"

"To retire, Madam, with the reverence of a daughter," returned Benigna, riſing with

with compoſed dignity, "I muſt now leave your preſence."

"At your peril, move!"

Benigna bowed obedience, and was reſeated.

"You ſhall quit this curſed ruin," the name ſhe generally gave the Priory, "you ſhall, upon my ſoul, quit it to-morrow!"

"Pardon me, Madam, I cannot!"

"Audacious! am I not your mother?"

"You tell me ſo," ſaid the poor perſecuted girl, tears of bitterneſs, which pride fain would have repreſſed, ſpringing to her eyes, "you tell me ſo, Madam."

"I tell you ſo, undutiful minx! you ſhall find it ſo. Deliver your keys; I ſhall ſpare your delicacy the fatigue of packing."

"What do you mean, Mrs. O'Connant," interrupted her brother, "by all this nonſenſical palaver? Thruſt her into the carriage at once, and let her traffic and trumpery come after, that is my way, Miſs!—So no more of your fine fantaſtical bombaſt: now you

glowing with every ſoftened filial ſentiment towards you, ſeverely felt an anger I never can, if I know myſelf, deſerve. I acknowledge your rights, your claims upon my will, and in every point, except leaving Ruthinglenne, will ſubmit to your ſuperior pleaſure."

"I thank you, Miſs, for your reſervations in duty and obedience," replied her mother, unmoved by her affecting addreſs, "which plainly ſay, when your pleaſure is mine, I will follow it; when it is not, why you ſhall have fine words for it."

"I am unhappy, Madam, in not being able, in any way, to convince you I wiſh to prove a dutiful and obedient daughter; but even our virtues have limits, which, paſſing a certain point, degenerate into vices!"

"Your education has been more philoſophic and abſtruſe than mine," ſaid Mrs. O'Connant ſarcaſtically; "but perhaps your uncle may hit upon the point."

"I ſhall

"I ſhall never be a pupil to him you dignify with the appellation of my uncle.—With your permiſſion, Madam, I would retire—I feel rather indiſpoſed."

Mr. John had quitted the room while Benigna was ſpeaking; but re-entering, as ſhe requeſted leave to retire, with Timothy and the ſupper, her mother's features relaxed.—"Do not ſleep in anger," ſhe ſaid, gently detaining her; "eat a bit, and let us try to manage matters better than we have done."

"Be but kind, deareſt Madam," cried Benigna, burſting into tears, and preſſing the offered hand with dutiful fervor to her lips, "be but kind, my mother, and you ſhall manage me and my heart as you pleaſe for ever!"

Benigna's boſom was the manſion of purity and truth; ſuſpicion had never darkened the fair abode, nor one vindictive thought contaminated its angelic innocence:—all the meltings of a gentle nature dilated her heart as her mother ſpoke; ſhe

ſhe ſeated herſelf next to her at table, and at her requeſt having eat the wing of a chicken, to oblige her yet more, in an evil hour, ſhe received a glaſs of wine from the baleful hand of the ever-hated, ever-dreaded John O'Connant! Under the ſemblance of reconciling friendſhip it was given—in kindly unſuſpecting confidence it was drank!—Poor unoffending victim! doomed to ſuffer by the hand which ſhould have ſhielded thy innocence, without one apprehenſive tremor thy boſom ſwelled to meet the fatal ſtab!

A reflective ſilence enſued for ſome time after the ſupper was removed, among them all. Benigna was ſilent, but not unoccupied; imaginings, ſtrange and depreſſive, wandered through her brain, and created alarm in a boſom that never was darkened by one ſuſpicious thought; and ſhe reſolved to return next morning with the ſteward and houſekeeper to the Caſtle, and there take refuge alike from the arrogating power of her uncle, and the capricious unkindneſs of her

her mother, until her benefactress returned, or Lady Aveline consented to receive her.

She had scarcely time to form this mental arrangement before a heavy stupor overwhelmed her senses; every idea became imperfect, every power faintened, and respiration almost ceasing, she in vain endeavoured to arouse from a chilling numbness which seemed to pervade her whole frame; it felt every instant increasing, recollection failed, when bending beneath the heavy torpor of sensation, she at length fell, cold, stiff, and motionless, on the floor.

Her mother and Mr. John gazed around them, then interchanged a glance most significant, pointed to the prostrate insensible victim of their cruelty, and, for a time, remained suspended in vague and irresolute reflections. Malign exultation gleamed from the heavy eyes of John O'Connant, while a complicated pang of terror, doubt, and regret gave an uncommon cast to every livid feature of the mother.

"It

"It has taken effect," ſaid ſhe, a ſigh ſhe could in no way ſuppreſs nearly ſuffocating the words, "yes, John O'Connant, it has!"

"Profit by it then!" replied the ſavage, in accents ſcarce human—"profit by it!"

"Jeſus, ſave a ſinner!" reſumed the conſcience-ſtricken mother, ſhrinking aghaſt from the horror of upbraiding thoughts—"Jeſus ſave us! What is that?"

"The devil!" interrupted John O'Connant, "let us move her!"

"John O'Connant, ſee! it glides acroſs the room—dead! yes, look, it is ſo like Benigna!——I cannot move her! No—no—"

"Fire and fury on the woman!" exclaimed the brother, all the remorſeleſs paſſions of a blackened ſoul darkening his horrid viſage; "fire and fury! art thou hag-ridden, haunted!—leave the infernal den, and let ten thouſand fiends beſiege it!"

"They will purſue us, John O'Connant! me a mother! and—and murder——

Oh—

Oh—Oh—Oh! take me, ſhield me, hide me from—from——"

"Perdition to your canting woman's terrors!—Help to raiſe the girl—the carriage waits, and morning will diſcover all!"

"Diſcover!" repeated Mrs. O'Connant, "that would be ſomething indeed!"—Her lips were parched, her eyes glazed, and the cold drops of mental horror fell from her brows. Her brother forced her to ſwallow ſome wine; the alarm of conſcience ſubſided, ſhe then grew calm, and on a repeated deſire to raiſe the girl, ſhe obeyed; ſtill a ghaſtly paleneſs ſhaded her face, and every nerve ſhook with agitation! Benigna hung on her boſom; once ſhe preſſed her in her arms, and kiſſed her cold lips, but there was time for no more endearment!—Her brother took the inſenſible burden from her, and bore her to the waiting chaiſe, when, notwithſtanding the prayers, ſhrieks, and ſtruggles of the poor old horror-ſtruck Dorothy and Timothy, it drove away with

all imaginable velocity, leaving them to ineffectual regret and lamentation for the dangers they anticipated for their darling young miſtreſs!

CHAP. XVI.

BENIGNA Fitzalbert was not dead. Mrs. O'Connant had other views—her brother John even *more* deſtructive projects than death; abſence, it would appear, had deadened every maternal affection, and repreſſed thoſe throbbings of nature which might otherwiſe have pleaded for ſuch a daughter as Benigna.

Avarice is a paſſion particularly powerful in every mean breaſt: in Mrs. O'Connant's it was moſt prevailing; and from

from the firſt inſtant that ſhe ſurveyed Benigna's amazing lovelineſs, ſhe cheriſhed the hope of accumulating wealth by the barter of her beauty.

Lord Ruthinglenne's attachment had entirely defeated thoſe ſelfiſh purpoſes, and obſcured the golden expectations; for the marriage having been finally arranged before the commencement of her power over Benigna, it was impracticable to make conditions without betraying a ſentiment which, as matters ſtood, it was more to her intereſt, and more politic, to conceal; but no ſooner was that grand obſtacle obviated, than ſhe cruelly reſolved to bend Benigna to her pleaſure, and began her operations by removing her from the ſafe ſhelter of Ruthinglenne, where ſhe was perfectly ſenſible ſhe could never put her deſigns in execution. John O'Connant knew too well his power over his ſiſter-in-law's mind, to fear not dividing the ſpoils; and, actuated by this deteſtable motive, felt no remorſe in enforcing all that her mother contrived, whoſe mind,

unequal to the bold and daring efforts of a ruthleſs heart, would often have failed, but for the aid of his more ſtrong and hardened nature.

Not without reaſon, they ſuſpected that ſhe would perſevere in remaining at the Priory; and no ſooner was the opinion confirmed by her reſolute refuſal, than, fearing ſhe might bid defiance to both entreaties and threats, by taking refuge in the Caſtle, which would have ſuſtained a ten years' ſiege, the worſt and blackeſt of devils inſtigated John O'Connant to propoſe, and prepare a heavy ſoporific, that would for a certain time benumb her faculties, and deaden the powers of action.

The mother heſitated, lingered in her aſſent to the meaſure; but no other alternative appearing, and apprehenſive of ſome other diſappointment to her mercenary hopes, though ſhe could not *approve* it, did not *like* it, was not right in a mother, ſtill, as it was for her Benigna's advantage—and, to be ſure, certain reſorts became good

good or evil as they were *made* neceſſary—why the drops would only ſtupify her for a few hours, and then their indulgence, her ſiſter's company, and amuſements, would combine, and reconcile her to her change of ſituation.

Thus was the dark invention tolerated, adopted by a woman, and qualified, ſoftened by a mother: a few moments arranged the tranſaction. The potion was infuſed in the wine, and adminiſtered; and ſo deep and heavy did its drowſy qualities hang about the ſenſes of Benigna, that, after a rapid journey of two days, ſhe ſtill felt its ſtupifying influence.

There was a light and airy grandeur in every thing about the manſion of Mrs. O'Connant, which announced both taſte and affluence; but it intereſted not Benigna, nor could all the blandiſhments thrown out to allure her ſenſes engage attention for a moment, or excite one paſſing ſmile of approbation.

Her ſiſters, Norah and Elizabeth, were gay, handſome, high-ſpirited girls, fond of pleaſures, and eaſy in their manners; yet the eaſe was unchaſtened by that modeſt reſerve which Benigna had been taught gave the moſt bewitching charm to female beauty.

Norah, to the form and demeanor of an Amazon, ſeemed, by her emboldened air, to perpetually invade the province of man, and ſet his protection at defiance. She ſomewhat reſembled her mother; her features glowed with the ſame commanding expreſſion, and every geſture and action of her life evinced a mind equally maſculine, determined, and violent.

Elizabeth was much more prepoſſeſſing, her countenance fair and attractive, her figure perfectly feminine, and her manners mild and obliging, anxious to pleaſe, and entirely free from that haughty confidence which renders a woman rather an object of fear and diſguſt, than love and admiration.

admiration. Mrs. O'Connant had not exaggerated her authority over them, for they yielded her the moſt abject obedience, and knew no law but her imperious pleaſure.

Benigna's recollections of the paſt remained very imperfect; her intelligent mind ſeemed darkened by a ſtupifying melancholy; yet ſtill ſhe could ſilently obſerve that they never teſtified ſuch lively emotions of pleaſure as when preparing to go out; notwithſtanding which, Elizabeth often kindly offered to ſtay with Benigna, and, if poſſible, enliven her dejected ſpirits. On theſe occaſions, the ſweet ſufferer's gratitude would mildly gliſten in her languid eye; but the offer being ſternly interdicted by her mother, her head would bend, and the tear which ſenſibility ſwelled, drop in bitterneſs on her cold comfortleſs boſom.

"Miſs Fitzalbert muſt be introduced to company," ſaid Mrs. O'Connant, one morning at breakfaſt; "indulging her vapors, caprices, and ſilly regrets only adds to her weakneſs, and enervates the little

underſtanding ſhe may boaſt. I cannot longer ſubmit to impoſition on a nature ſhe has found particularly eaſy and complying.—I expect, Miſs, you will ſhew your obedience to-night."

A ſigh was Benigna's ſad reſponſe, her head ſunk on her boſom, then fell on her arms, as they lay croſſed dejectedly on the table; when, diſſolving in tears, ſhe was led by Elizabeth to her own room.

A large and ſplendid party was aſſembled in her mother's drawing-room that evening. The pretty ſiſters were all life and vivacity, while Benigna, who ſo lately could communicate ſpirit to every circle in which ſhe appeared, ſat remote from all, liſtleſs and diſconſolate, the very ſtatue of gloomy ſtupidity itſelf;—her intellects were ſtill confuſed, and the energy of her intelligent mind no longer could give animation to her figure, or ſparkled in her eyes; yet was her form ſo ſtriking, and her face ſo attractively ſoft and lovely, that ſhe excited univerſal notice, and her mother had

ſcarcely

ſcarcely words to anſwer the various enquiries made about her beautiful daughter.

Among the gay flutterers aſſembled this night, appeared the daſhing, diſſipated Lord Hareham. His bold licentious eye ſoon fixed on the modeſt bloſſom of Ruthinglenne, and with obtruſive familiarity overwhelmed her with fulſome, adulative nonſenſe; till, wearied with her ſilence and reſerve, he left her for ſomething more jocund and mirth-inſpiring.

Mrs. O'Connant, irritated at her reſerved behaviour, with indignation flaſhing from her eyes, in a ſtern whiſper commanded her to play cards.

She never played cards at the Caſtle, was the anſwer.

"Wretch! go to the muſic-room. Did you do that at the Caſtle?"

"Yes," and all her muſic was there, ſhe replied, with immoveable calmneſs.

Her mother was nearly ſuffocating with repreſſed paſſions, and, with a look boding her no good, ordered her to confine herſelf

to her own room, when, riſing with as much unconcern as if no one had been preſent, with ſlow and quiet demeanor ſhe obeyed, but had ſcarcely reached the door of her own chamber, when, turning round to cloſe it, ſhe beheld Lord Hareham.

"Pretty Benigna!" he exclaimed, unabaſhed by her diſdainful, repulſive frown, "faith, you are worth a fair trial, and are not the firſt who has preferred a *tête-à-tête* with me. Is it not ſo, my fair roſe?—Nay, but prithee relax thoſe pretty features; for theſe petrifying airs are poſitively congealing to every ſoft ſenſation, and, do you know, have moſt diſſolvent qualities on a lover's affection."

She deigned not one word, but was compoſedly leaving the room, when, with libertine boldneſs, he caught her in his deſtroying arms, and, half fond, half angry, ſwore *he* deteſted coldneſs in a miſtreſs, and would no longer be oppoſed.

Pained, intimidated, ſhocked, and ſurpriſed at inſults her delicate mind, ſo far from

from ſuſtaining, had never even conceived, ſhe burſt from his vile, contaminating graſp, and, during a momentary gleam of recollection, ſhuddered, and ſhrunk, abaſhed, from the vehement glare of his licentious eyes; but the evaneſcent ſpark no more, ſhe relapſed into former inanity of thought, gazed wildly ſad at the preſuming invader of her honor, and ſtretching out her arms, as if to cling to ſome one for protection, burſt into a loud hyſteric laugh.

"What metamorphoſe next!" ſaid the incorrigible wretch, looking in her pale face for ſome explanation—"what next?"

No expreſſion appeared there; only the unmeaning ſmile remained, giving a glare of added anguiſh to features entirely unintelligent; yet might her looks have diſarmed the hyena of her rage, and allured the ſavage from his purpoſe; but the depraved heart of Lord Harcham had never been ſoftened by one relenting throb of humanity, and with ruffian violence, while the baſeſt of paſſions inflamed every for-

bidding feature, he reclaſped her in his arms, and ſuſpended her breath by his unhallowed kiſſes.

She felt exhauſted, and could reſiſt but feebly; for every ſtruggle ſunk fainter and fainter, and the abandoned profligate, deſtitute of honor, devoid of feeling, was proceeding to the moſt indelicate and daring freedoms, when, with that quiet cunning ſo peculiar to the deranged mind, ſhe drew from her pocket a pair of ſharp-pointed ſciſſars, and, before her purpoſe could be ſuſpected, the deſtroyer felt the ſtab in his blackened boſom, and perceived the blood ſtreaming to the floor.

Her poor enfeebled hand had been unfaithful to its office, and only penetrated the fleſh; but of that ſhe thought not, the monſter's deſigns were impeded, and for that time the honor of Benigna was ſafe.

The daſtardly ſpirit of the inhuman wretch ſhrunk aghaſt at the appearance of the ſanguine ſtream; and, trembling with terror leſt danger might enſue, uttering the moſt

moſt horrid imprecations at the mild yet heroic defender of her own purity, in all the ſhaking horrors of cowardice, he ſtaggered from her preſence, enduring, for once in his life, the puniſhment of a meditated tranſgreſſion.

CHAP. XVII.

UNAPPREHENSIVE, compoſed, and, indeed, indifferent to all poſſible conſequences of what ſhe had done, Benigna continued to ſit on the bed where Lord Harcham had left her. She hoped nothing, feared nothing; yet ſtill ſome indeſcribable ſenſation partaking of both, pervaded her poor agitated frame, and diſplayed its

uncertain meaning over her ſweet countenance, giving it an air of indeterminate alarm and ſerenity; inſtinctively ſhe bolted the door of her chamber, yet ſtill, from a complicated idea of interruption, ſhe would not undreſs.

All within the manſion of her mother ſeemed now to be at reſt; not a ſound broke on the deathlike ſtillneſs of the heavy hour; the buſy tumult of the evening had ſubſided, and voluptuous pleaſure, ſated at its impureſt banquet, ſickened of its own palling delights, now had yielded to repoſe; yet Benigna could not ſleep—ſhe could only ſuffer.

"Such vigils muſt I keep!" ſaid ſhe, the guiding ſpark of reaſon emitting a tranſient gleam. She pauſed, a faintened ray of recollection ſtrengthened on her penſive ſpirit, thought turned inward, and ſhe would have ruminated on the ſtrange miſery of her hard condition; but, alas! her ſhaken ſenſes were unequal to reflection—in a moment the powers of reaſon were obſcured,

obſcured, inanity returned, and again Benigna was loſt in vacancy. She drew repeated ſighs, deep and heavy; while the diſordered ſenſes wandering through a liſtleſs void, again ſhe uttered "Such vigils muſt I keep!" and again, for a time, ſhe was herſelf.

She threw her eyes around with anguiſhed wildneſs, and while ſhe preſſed one hand to her beating heart, with the other ſhe held her burning head, and ſinking by the bed upon her knees, in the fervor of that piety, which in all conditions was the governing principle of her mind, ſhe breathed forth the pure though unconnected effuſions of her innocent ſpirit before the mercy-ſeat of her Creator. Surely the aſpirings of a hallowed ſoul aſcend on high! for ſhe felt an holy ardor animate her enfeebled frame, which imparted to every livid feature a ſoft ſeraphic charm.

In this hallowed calm of the ſenſes, ſhe threw herſelf on the bed, and inclining to drowſineſs, might have yielded to the balmy

balmy influence of a refreſhing ſlumber; but in the inſtant that Nature had forgot her toils, and was burying all in temporary oblivion, an indiſtinct noiſe, which every moment increaſed, made her ſtart. Her chamber was ſecured; the embers of the fire were expiring, and the dim quiver of her taper, on the point of extinction, ſhed a gloomy beam through the apartment.—Benigna had never been ſuperſtitious; and though one memorable circumſtance in her life gave awful evidence of immaterial beings viſiting our nether world, ſhe was now unapprehenſive; and no imagination more terrific than that it was the riſing wind, or paſſenger in the ſtreet, that had diſturbed her ſlumber, occurred.

She recompoſed herſelf, and again cloſed her eyes, but ſoon was diſturbed. The ſounds grew louder. She aroſe, and, liſtening, words of black myſterious import ſtruck her ear, and appalled her languid beating heart.

"Be

"Be reſolute," ſaid a voice ſhe knew to be the obdurate John O'Connant's, "be reſolute! I will prepare—reward and victory are your's."

Intervening ſentences might have been loſt, but Benigna had heard enough to freeze her blood, and harrow up her ſoul. She clung to the curtains, as if they could have yielded her the ſuccour and concealment ſhe wanted—ſhe groaned in agony, but could reſpire no prayer, and each faint ſenſe was faſt receding, when a door, with curious art conſtructed in the wainſcot, flew open, and two men, with quick and heavy ſteps, approached, and ſtood before her. One ſhe inſtantly recogniſed as the torturing fiend, the evil genius of her life, John O'Connant.

The darkneſs of death, and malign determination, ſat on his heavy unbending brows, and ſome ſecret purpoſe, horrid as the blackeſt, felleſt demon's ſuggeſtion, lurked in his fierce, relentleſs eyes. He was accompanied by a man whoſe figure, erect, auguſt,

auguſt, and commanding, looked as if the world was made for his enjoyment, and its inhabitants for his pleaſure.

Benigna ſat immoveable, enveloped in a wild, ſuſpenſive horror, until Mr. John O'Connant drew near, when, ferociouſly graſping her arm, in a whiſper, audibly hollow, addreſſed her.

"You are a murderer, and your life a forfeit to the law—only one power can ſave you."

"Only one Power!"

Her eyes were meekly raiſed as ſhe made the repetition—"Only one Power!" but ſoon they fell in anguiſh and diſmay.

"Yes, only one power can ſave you," reiterated her ruthleſs perſecutor—"*here* he ſtands."

"*Here!*" thought Benigna, but ſhe uttered nothing, and John O'Connant proceeded.

"Even now the ſword is drawn—they hunt you, and juſtice ſeeks the life of Lord Hareham's murderer. Yet, be reaſonable,

ſonable, and you may be ſaved. This gentleman can move the ſprings of power at will; and, ſpite of all your waywardneſs, can love you. Reſolve then—make his arms your refuge from deſtruction, his embraces your protection from an ignominious death. This moment is your own—the next belongs to fate. Time preſſes; then decide."

"Death!" cried Benigna, with a ghaſtly wildneſs, idea wandering through a labyrinth of horror, and unconſcious of the threatened danger—"death!"

"Yes," reſumed the remorſeleſs villain, "the worſt of deaths—the death of ſhame, of——"

"Ceaſe—forbear!" interrupted the ſtranger, in a voice of ſuperiority—"begone—leave us,—ſhe ſeems nearly maddened!—and yet, how beautiful—how angel-like!—and yet I muſt—I will——"

He ceaſed to ſpeak—looked round—O'Connant had diſappeared, and he was left alone with Benigna.

This

This man, the arbiter of poor Benigna's fate, was voluptuous, ſenſual, unprincipled, and tyrannic. Through life he had been the bane of female happineſs, and the deſtroyer of female purity;—to reduce the dignity of innocence, and ſubdue the glowing pride of unſullied virtue, he conſidered his glory; but to effect the ruin of tried and tempted honor would be a triumph indeed—be the moſt brilliant achievement in the annals of gallantry.

This phœnix in the female world Benigna had been deſcribed and declared; and her heroic repulſe of Lord Hareham had ſo inflamed his imagination, and enhanced the value of her charms, that no law, human or divine, could have deterred him from the infamous deſign of adding her to the many his vile paſſions had precipitated to ruin, miſery, diſgrace, and an early grave.

At his command, O'Connant had withdrawn from the chamber; and when he himſelf had examined the doors and room,

to

to be ſecure from interruption, he approached the bed where Benigna reclined almoſt inconſcious, and took her hand. It was cold and nerveleſs, as if the ice of death had chilled the circling current. He put it in his boſom: it remained paſſive, and he then preſſed it on a heart that was throbbing with the wild impaſſioned wiſh of reducing its poor poſſeſſor to the duſt.

The arm he had left at liberty was twined around the bed-poſt, and her beamleſs eyes inconſciouſly fixed on his face. Perhaps ſhe would have ſpoke, but deep convulſive gaſps precluded utterance, and her boſom heaved as if labouring in the pangs of ſeparating nature;—an aſhy hue ſhaded her countenance, from which all expreſſion, except of anguiſh, had fled; yet ſtill an intereſting charm, a wild, touching melancholy appeared in every lovely feature, which muſt have broke a gentle heart, though it could not bend, or ſoften a bad one from its unhallowed deſign. He gazed upon her with unholy rapture; his blackened

ened heart ſwelled high with impetuous wiſhes, when, with impure and unchaſtened tranſport, he claſped her modeſt form to his contaminating boſom.

"This moment is auſpicious to my purpoſe," cried the fiend, exulting in her unoppoſing weakneſs; "the better powers are gracious, and befriend me; here Love may revel till he faints with bliſs, and Pleaſure banquet till grown ſick with joy.—How fair, how beautiful, how inviting is this boſom!" continued the inhuman monſter, kiſſing the innocent breaſt, no longer able to repel the daring outrage. "Oh Heaven! thou couldſt not recompenſe me for this moment loſt!—Ecſtacy!"

He ceaſed—forbore—ſtarted aghaſt—felt awfully ſuſpended in his ſacrilegious purpoſe. Benigna had been loſt, a wreck beneath the reach of hope—beyond the poſſibility of comfort, but in the inſtant moſt eventful and important, even in the moment critical, a ſudden blaze of light irradiated the chamber; repeated groans of ſtrong indignant

indignant anguiſh ſounded fearfully around; a vibratory motion ſhook the floor, and, as if impelled by more than mortal violence and force, the ſtranger ſtaggered ſome paces from his intended victim, and then ſtood as if transfixed with agony, and ſtiffened in horror.

Benigna felt the eternal Power, the benign, the gracious agency of Heaven to ſave her; for a moment every ſenſe grew perfect, every faculty enlarged, every thought enwrapped. She ſunk on her knees in holy humble reverence; her pure ſpirit ſoared, and for a minute Benigna was in heaven.

Meantime the ſtranger moved not—ſpoke not—breathed not; the fiends, the powers to whom his faculties were ſubjugated, fled aghaſt, and could not bear the preſence in which the ſinner ſtood; ſuperior energy cruſhed their pervading influence, and his harrowed ſpirit ſhivered unſupported in the ſurrounding horror.

Cold

Cold drops of dewy agony hung on his livid, tenſive brows; he gaſped in torture, ſhook in frenzy, and at length aſpirated, as if from out of the yawning gulph of black deſpair, a few terrific unintelligible words.

"Too bright ſpirit!—awful apparition! —What—what—I ſee that gaping—Oh appalling ſight!—Oh—Oh—Oh—Oh!"

Benigna heard him ſpeak, and gazed to find what his words intimated he beheld; but though ſhe felt a ſweet and ſacred calm, moſt ſurely the ſoft emanation of an heavenly influence, ſhe could perceive nothing.

A voice deep and tremendous was heard—

"Murderer! murderer! murderer!—damn thyſelf no more!—My child—remember!"

The appalled wretch ſhuddered in the horror of guilt, internal pangs diſtorted every livid feature, and in the agony of dreadful recollections he fell inſenſible to the floor.

A ſoft

A ſoft ſtrain of harmony now dilated the whole frame of Benigna, a mild voice ſounded on her ear, and though ſolemn, was yet melting and impreſſive. The heart of Benigna beat with ſerene and indefinable ecſtacy within her breaſt, a flood of immortal pleaſure thrilled through her frame, her boſom expanded with mild and filial rapture, and opening her arms, as if to enfold the bleſſed ſomething, her ſenſes felt the voice ſweet, ſoft, tender, and melodious as the gentleſt angel's whiſper, while it uttered—

"*My child*——"

Benigna bowed in reverence; and as ſhe would have raiſed her eyes to view the gracious preſence, all grew dark, the room ſhook, a bell tolled three, and in the inſtant following, the ſtranger uttered a piercing ſhriek, when the room-door was rudely, violently burſt open, and Mrs. O'Connant, attended by her brother, approached her; and thought reverting to the ſaddened moment, when informed ſhe was to die

for Lord Hareham's murder, the preceding ſcene faded from remembrance, and ſhe looked at them beſeeching pity—but ſhe hoped for what they never knew. They dragged her from the chamber. She ſhrieked, fainted; and though ſhe ſoon felt renovating animation, with the happineſs fled the ſenſes of the perſecuted Benigna.

CHAP. XVIII.

A MELANCHOLY lapſe of time had been loſt to Benigna; and though her convaleſcence was now gradually progreſſive, the brighter energies of her mind were ſtill imperfect, and all ideas of the paſt vague and

and indiſtinct; and when any reflective ray broke over the gloomy chaos of thought, it only was the ſudden ſtart of painful remembrance. Of her preſent condition, ſhe had little cauſe apparently to complain—ſhe was carefully watched, reſpectfully attended, and with every thing around her that could conduce to either convenience or comfort.

Since her recovery, ſhe had perceived ſeveral people, who were ſtrangers to her, paſs and repaſs the different chambers on a level with her own, yet being totally unintereſted about them, ſhe had made no enquiry; but awaking one day from a ſweet reſtoring ſlumber, reflection, as it ſtrengthened, inſpired a reſtleſs deſire to be better acquainted with the place and beings with whom ſhe now reſided: for not having ſeen either her mother, ſiſters, or uncle John for a conſiderable time, ſhe indulged a hope that ſhe was removed from their terrifying power.

This day, on awaking, recollections particularly crowded on her weakened mind,

and, in a tumult of riſing emotions, ſhe threw on her petticoats, and gazed around her.

It appeared by the ſunbeams, to draw near the cloſe of day.

"My time paſſes ſtrangely now," thought Benigna, but ſhe uttered nothing; the bed on which ſhe repoſed was richly luxurious, the apartments ſuperb, the furniture coſtly, and the decorations gay, light, and airy: the linen ſhe wore was of the fineſt texture, richly laced, and before the fire, on an Indian ſcreen, hung a change equally elegant.

All was ſilent, quiet around her, only a diſtant murmur at intervals broke on her ear, and interrupted the myſterious ſtillneſs that reigned. It appeared ſomething like enchantment, which curioſity, not unblended with fear, ardently deſired to diſſolve; and with the wiſh heightening into anxiety, ſhe had the taſſel in her hand, to pull the bell, when the chamber-door ſlowly opened, and a genteel-looking young woman

woman cautiouſly advanced, as if fearful of diſturbing her repoſe. She had brought in her hand an elegant dreſs of white crape ſpotted with ſilver, which ſhe was about to depoſit in a wardrobe; but, on perceiving Benigna ſeated on the bed, ſhe threw it aſide, and with eager kindneſs expreſſed pleaſure at ſeeing her up, and hoped ſhe found herſelf much better.

"Yes, very well indeed," replied Benigna, haſtily; "but I have had long and ſtrange dreams, and indiſtinct fancies ſtill purſue me. Pray, good girl, who am I with, and where am I?"

"Where are you, Miſs? why in a houſe of pleaſure."

"Pleaſure!"

"Yes, Miſs, kept by Mrs. O'Connant."

"My mother?"

"Your mother!" repeated the girl, with an uncommon ſmile, "your mother! God help your ſimplicity! Why, Miſs, ſhe has a ſcore ſuch daughters as you in this houſe."

"Are you?" ſaid the girl. "That is well; and he will take you out—and love you—and live the life of honor with you—and——"

"And now I think again," cried Benigna, inſenſible to what ſhe had added, "it cannot be my Ruthinglenne—no, no, there muſt be Lords beſide him."

"See him, and make him your friend, however," adviſed the poor attendant;—"*he may* feel pity—here you will find none!"

"None from my mother!" cried Benigna, raiſing her hands and eyes. "I am her child; and though her brother *is* a barbarian——"

"Indeed, Miſs," interrupted the girl, ſhaking her head, "you know as little as I once did. Mr. John is her huſband here."

"Huſband!—what three huſbands?"

"She never had one, I'll be ſworn."

"Oh yes!" replied Benigna—"Oh yes, *one*—ſhe had one!" and ſad remembrance kindled

kindled the pride of ſhame as ſhe ſpoke—"Yes, yes, *my father was married!*"

"I have no doubt of that, my dear young lady;—but let me dreſs you to receive this Lord. I think—for he looks *good*, though in a bad place—that through him you may be ſaved."

Benigna, in the depth of ſerious thought, remained entirely paſſive, and allowed the attentive Patty to attire her mild, modeſt figure as ſuited her fancy, till ſhe propoſed a *frizeur* to dreſs her fine flaxen hair *a-la-Greque*.

"I will not have him!" cried Benigna, impatiently, and faſtening up her profuſion of ringlets with her comb—"I will not ſee him!"

"I will," ſaid her attendant, ſmiling, "is a ſound never heard in this houſe, but from the lips of our ſuperiors; but you are beautiful any way, and ſhall be indulged."

"Indulged!" retorted Benigna, a momentary ray of former intelligence bright-

ening her features, "and yet I think you termed *this* a houſe of pleaſure—with me, pleaſure *was* free, eaſy, unreſtrained,—what is it here?"

Again the poor good-natured Patty thought Benigna knew as little as ſhe once did herſelf, and continuing to ornament her unreſiſting form, proceeded—

"The inhuman and wicked, my ſweet young lady, *call* it a houſe of pleaſure, becauſe it not only tolerates, but ſanctions, abets, and promotes thoſe actions which cannot be perpetrated in public; betrayed virtue, undone innocence, broken-hearted honor, know it the houſe of ſhame and agony. On *this ſide* profligacy and libertiniſm can conveniently indulge their looſe and vile deſires; on the *other ſide* our notable huſband, father, brother John—all, or any of the relatives that may ſuit the motive and the moment, holds a faro-bank, and a *rouge-et-noir* table. Over *that* extravagance may exhauſt itſelf, and diſſipation cloſe its career; there fond and faithful wives,

wives, lovely and promiſing children, honor and honeſty, peace and innocence, friends and friendſhip, are alike ſacrificed; there the victims ſit down ſwelling with the ruthleſs hope of plundering others, or the more dreaded horror of deſtroying themſelves, burning in their depraved boſoms; and there they riſe fit compeers for the devil himſelf, for having goaded others on to death and ruin, or ruſhing there themſelves, uncalled and unprepared."

"Mighty and protecting Lord, what an arcana of wickedneſs and horror is here diſplayed!" exclaimed Benigna, who too attentively had liſtened.—"How, poor, good girl, did you come here? Your eyes beam kindneſs, and feeling ſoftens every feature of your face—then pity me!"

"I do, dear Miſs, but cannot help you, cannot ſave you; and though hereafter you may think on me——"

"And who are you?" interrupted Benigna, her ideas again wandering indiſtinctly—"who are you?"

"Nobody, compared to you; yet I was innocent, and though never greater, every way better than I am. To a poor honeſt father, and an induſtrious virtuous mother, I owe my ſad exiſtence. They bred me in decency, educated me with humility, and when I was near nineteen, would have married me to an honeſt-hearted young man, their own nephew; but I had, ſome evil way or other, imbibed higher notions, and was deſirous of ſeeing what is called *the world*.

"Too ſoon an opportunity offered to gratify my ardent longings. A gentleman and his family came to paſs the ſummer in our village (for it was famous for an abundant trout-ſtream,) and the lady, on her departure, wanting a ſervant for the nurſery, I was engaged to attend her and two children to London. She kept but two maids, and I had enough to do; but ſhe was ſo kind, gentle, and careful of me, that I might have been happy, aye and innocent, with her now, but that the bane of ignorant woman

woman poſſeſſed me. I longed for dreſs, grew tired of plain-work, and thought her top ſtrict in never allowing me to go out with the young men and women that invited me to ſhare their amuſements.

"On the watch for what my folly imagined a *better* place, I grew inattentive, and loſing the wiſh to pleaſe, ſoon loſt the power. My maſter and miſtreſs, perceiving my diſcontent and negligence, offered to ſend me to my parents, but that did not ſuit my views; and my miſtreſs ſoon after laying in, I had more liberty to walk about with the children, and in one of our rambles I met a lady, who, entering into converſation with me, ſoon underſtood, from my open replies, that I wanted a place.

"*She immediately wanted* an upper ſervant, liked my mild appearance, would diſcover my merits and demerits, never deſired a character which was often dictated by ill-nature or caprice, and in a hapleſs evil hour I engaged myſelf to this *eaſy, good-humoured lady.*

"You

"You seem impatient;—I am nearly arrived at what I am. Clandestinely I left my virtuous mistress, and unsuspiciously made my courtesy here. I was welcomed, indulged, had my darling wish, was dressed, and in three little weeks was consigned to the arms of voluptuous villany.

"Oh God! let youth be taught that in the first step lies all the difficulty of vice. The smear of paint soon usurped the blush of innocence; the timid, downcast look of modesty soon yielded to the confident stare of emboldened freedom; and, unawed and unabashed, I stood the prostitute avowed!

"The uncultivated mind seldom reflects; the sting of remorse could not penetrate a heart so hardened, and I was hurrying along the downhill path of deep perdition, when Nature herself received a vital stab. Flaunting one day through the Strand, in all my rainbow finery, the cold, trembling hand of a poor woman wildly grasped mine. I turned, with scornful pride, to reprove the freedom, when my eye caught the look—

the

the anguiſhed look of my poor mother! Mild as unupbraiding as was her eye, it laid the iron rod of remorſe on my accuſing ſpirit. She continued to wring my hand, and while ſhe gazed with ſpeechleſs meaning, fell, convulſed, into my trembling arms.

"A gentleman ſupported us into the neareſt ſhop, when, to overwhelm me with ſhame as well as guilt, it proved my maſter. To me he deigned no word; but, viewing my figure with a degree of pitying contempt, left a guinea for my mother, and took his leave.

"For ſome moments my poor parent lay inſenſible; but volatiles being applied, they ſo far ſucceeded, that her eyes uncloſed, when, fixing their laſt receding beam upon my ruined form, ſhe feebly groaned—'My child!' and in maternal torture reſigned the burden of an exiſtence my infamy had diſgraced!

"My father had died ſome months before, and with his lateſt breath implored her to

to ſeek, and, if poſſible, reclaim, their undone Patty. She repoſed his honeſt remains in hallowed earth, and then, in obedience to his laſt commands, haſtened to town; but vain were her enquiries, ineffectual her purſuits. I had abandoned the abodes of Goodneſs, the paths of Virtue, and my mother's harmleſs feet knew the way to no other; and ſhe was returning, hopeleſs and diſconſolate, to her deſolate widowed home, when chance produced what all her reſearches could not effect.—Oh, not chance—the hand of ſwift avenging Heaven conducted me to hear the laſt groan of an affectionate mother murdered by my infamy. The ſudden, awful manner of her death ſtruck me at once with penitence, horror, remorſe, and deſpair. My wearied ſpirit, wretched, weak, and wicked as it was, would now have reformed, and ſought the paths of honeſt, virtuous induſtry, but deſerved ſcorn, merited contempt, and abhorrence followed my ſteps. My labor was rejected, my ſervices repulſed,

and

and my repentance ridiculed or diſbelieved. Nobody would employ a proſtitute; there was no one to ſhelter her miſeries, no one to encourage her penitence, no one to reclaim a wretch, no one to ſave a ſoul—and for me a Redeemer was to die in vain, becauſe humanity, imperfect, erring humanity, would not imitate his mercy, by allowing opportunity 'to *ſin no more.*'

"Beauty had never been my poſſeſſion, but I had youth, fine ſpirits, and good-nature; and where they proved my deſtruction, I was obliged to return and accept refuge. The houſe was now eſtabliſhed, and in high repute for beauty, faſhion, and all thoſe attractive faſcinations ſo valuable to the libertine, the impure, and ſatiated voluptuary; it therefore required little entreaty to prevail on Mrs. O'Connant to allow me to attend the perſons, inſtead of ſharing the pleaſures, of her ladies. This has been my avocation for ſome little time, when, as much as my feeble power admits, and my own ſafety allows, I counteract the intentions

intentions of guilt, and aſſiſt the deſigns of innocence ſtruggling to preſerve itſelf. Avarice, revenge, and deſire are all at work to effect your ruin; and your only chance of eſcape is in the generoſity of your lover to-night. Obſerve then, in mercy to yourſelf, where he is moſt vulnerable, and there aſſail him. Your diſſimulation will be in the defence of virtue, and the ſupport of innocence; and the Protector of the good will bleſs the purpoſe, and effect your deliverance."

With poor Patty's narrative and well-meant counſels concluded Benigna's toilet, and with them we will alſo conclude this long chapter.

CHAP.

CHAP. XIX.

BENIGNA'S fine fragile form was now arrayed in the ſilver ſpotted robe; and though her ſweet eyes no longer beamed the ſparkling intelligence which was perpetually diſplaying the brilliancy of her mind, ſtill there was a nameleſs charm which imparted a ſoftened intereſting energy over her whole countenance. The beautiful glow of her cheek had yielded to an aſhy whiteneſs, and the touching melancholy diffuſed over her modeſt features increaſed the delicate languor of a frame, whoſe dignity bending beneath the preſſure of dejection and illneſs, might

might have melted the moſt obdurate heart, and ſubdued the moſt rugged nature. So enervated was become her mind, ſo reduced her intellectual ſyſtem, that it was with difficulty ſhe could either connect the circumſtances of Patty's ſtory, or retain her directions how to proceed in the momentous interview impending; ſhe felt herſelf unequal to the trial, looked down with deſpondency—but looking up, repoſed on the defence of the feeble and unhappy.

The evening was now far advanced; the time-piece over the chimney announced the hour of nine, when Patty, having perſuaded her to ſwallow ſome chocolate, led her into an adjoining room, ſplendidly illuminated with perfumed wax-lights. The hangings and ſofas were of ſatin, richly embroidered; and the luxurious paintings, as they reflected each other's glowing beauties in the lengthened mirrors ſurrounding the apartment, ſeemed calculated to charm the voluptuary, and gratify the ſenſualiſt.

A table

A table was elegantly ſpread with the richeſt wines and the choiceſt delicacies; invention ſeemed exhauſted to render the repaſt luxurious; no coſt, no trouble had been ſpared in the preparation—all united to intoxicate the ſenſes, and to charm the taſte, yet was it loſt on the deſtined victim.

Had ſhe even been *all herſelf*, her delicate mind and refined taſte would have revolted from magnificence, which modeſty could not ſanction, and only the ſenſual could approve.

Indifferent to every thing about her, without even a paſſing glance as ſhe walked through the room, ſhe threw herſelf on a ſofa, when, waving her hand for Patty to leave her, ſhe drew her robe over her to ſhield her eyes from the blaze of light, and leaning her head on her arm, was ſoon abſorbed in one of thoſe calm deliriums, which for a length of time had announced the derangement of her mental ſyſtem.

During this reverie, imagination bore her to the Caſtle, to the Priory, and then to the altar with Auguſtus. Now ſhe beheld the ſpirit of her benefactor riſe—again the airy form flitted, and ſhe mourned by the ſide of Ruthinglenne—then Lord Hareham, the ſtranger, the ruthleſs, ſavage John O'Connant, and her mother, floated in wild confuſion over her mind. Suddenly the ſcene would change; ſhe was ſick—burning, and vainly ſtruggling to eſcape from the violence of oppreſſive tyrants; anon ſhe was liſtening to the poor Patty lamenting her fall—wiſhing to raiſe her—wiſhing to weep for her; but ſhe had no tear—no; that relief to pent-up nature, to unutterable woe, no longer ſoftened her pale tenſive cheek, or lightened the burning weight upon her troubled brain.

Thus had imagination made its heavy painful circuit, yet ſtill no charm appeared to obliviate the anguiſhed throbs of recollection. An hour or two might have elapſed

elapſed in this agonizing delirium of the ſhattered ſenſes, when the hand which hung negligently by her ſide, was ſoftly, though ſuddenly, raiſed; and, on receiving rather a reſpectful than an impaſſioned preſſure, ſhe threw the robe from her face in trembling alarm, and, raiſing her languid rayleſs eyes, gaſped as if in the laſt ſtruggle of convulſive nature. Oh God! who can deſcribe, what were the feelings of either at the trying moment!

"Benigna Fitzalbert!"

"Sir Anſtruther Buckingham!"

were pronounced by both in the ſame inſtant; again the faint ray of returning reaſon, that had dawned over the perſecuted innocent girl's mind, was obſcured; the ſuddenneſs, the ſurpriſe of the pleaſure were too powerful, and again, with a ſaddened ſmile, the intereſting ſufferer ſunk into her former inanity of idea.

Sir Anſtruther threw himſelf beſide her, and ſupported her enfeebled trembling frame upon his own tortured boſom.

A pale

A pale anguiſh deadened his every expreſſive feature, his eyes alternately beamed the ſofteſt, fondeſt pity, and glared with the wildeſt, fierceſt indignation; all the energies of a great, tender, and generous ſoul were awfully awakened, and his ſpirit trembled within its tortured abode. Love, deſpair, rage, horror, and vengeance were all at once aſſailing his heart, and all alike impatient for their ardent claims upon his agonized feelings; for a time his miſery was mute--he could only gaze in ſilent anguiſh on the pale melancholy dear-one before him. What a change ſince he beheld her laſt!—blooming, beautiful, innocent, happy, and approved; the darling of admiring friends, the worſhipped of his adoring heart, and the faireſt, ſweeteſt pattern of excelling nature.

Behold her now!—Where—how—what! Oh horror! horror! horror! His ſoul ſickened with pain at the dreadful contraſt; a burning tear, wrung by mental torture from his manly eye, fell on the angel reclining

reclining on him, and ſomewhat allayed the ſwell of warring paſſions, and reſtored him to the power of utterance.

" Benigna!—wretched—wretched,—yet ſtill loved, adored Benigna!—I ſcarce can ſpeak it!—Oh the riſing tumult!—this deadly ſtorm—poor, poor girl!—You are not married?"

Benigna ſhook her head.

" Where, where is Ruthinglenne?" and his eyes darted gloomy fire—" where is Ruthinglenne?"

As he ſpoke, ſhe looked mildly in his face, and replied, as her mind rewandered through the confuſion of faintened recollection—

" He left me to——"

" Execrable monſter!—left you to periſh —periſh in infamy and madneſs! Loſt Benigna! Why did you—why did he not marry you?"

A wild, vacant ſmile played over her pallid features.

"Marry—marry me! Ah no! the ſpirit of—of my benefactor interdicted that——"

"A ſpirit! Pitiful villain! Deſpicable ſubterfuge! A ſpirit!"

"Oh yes, it came indeed, and ſo awful, yet ſo mild; looked ſo kind, and yet ſo fearful on us—was ſo tremendous, and the curſe ſo heavy, that—that we did not marry, and Ruthinglenne fainted, and I held him in my arms, to keep him from the cold damp ſtones, though I was hardly able, and then he grew ill, and was delirious, and raged, and prayed for me, and I went to him, and kiſſed him, and nurſed him, and lay by him every, every night, and then he recovered, and——"

She pauſed; the chain of rapid thought was loſt, and Sir Anſtruther, in all the emphaſis mental ſuffering could impart to words, added—

"And you are here!"

"And

"And I am here!" ſhe repeated, unconſcious what his inference was.

"Unhappy girl! How I would have cheriſhed you, even unto death! would have ſuſtained your gentleneſs, and guarded your honor! Your happineſs would have been my care, and your virtues my pleaſure; you would have been my pride, my delight, my wife; for Oh! *I* loved you, Benigna, with a ſentiment ſo pure and fervent, ſo holy, ſo conſtant, and diſintereſted, that angels might have owned the paſſion, and continued immaculately bright."

Benigna looked in his face, as if to penetrate the full meaning of all he had uttered; but her imperfect memory loſt more than it retained. Two words ſhe eagerly caught, and repeated with a ſaddening ſmile—

"Loved me! Yes, I thought ſo; but I was then happy, and the Counteſs was my mother, and Euphemia my ſiſter, and Ruthinglenne——"

She ceaſed, deeply ſighed, and ſunk into gloomy ſilence.

"Madden me not *yet*, Benigna, with that name! Oh curſe, doubly curſe——"

"Do not curſe him!" interrupted ſhe, in the ſweeteſt tone of pity, "do not curſe him; the ſpirit did that!"

"Name him not then," replied Sir Anſtruther, mournfully, while the paleneſs of incontrollable anguiſh ſhaded his features—"name him not then! I cannot bear it! but would ſave you, ſhelter you, reſtore you to reaſon, lead you to peace, encourage penitence, and—and——You know where you are, Benigna?"

"Oh yes! they call it, I think, a houſe of pleaſure. Ha, ha! *I know* what it is; and my mother, too, Mrs. O'Connant—I remember—Ah, how joyful the ſound of *mother* was to my ear, how bitter the feeling to my aching heart!"

The countenance of Benigna appeared reanimated while uttering theſe few words, and

and her intelligent eye betrayed the anguiſh of her ſoul. She ſhuddered in the whirl of a momentary recollection, when ſenſible to the dangers and horrors of her condition, claſping the arms which ſtill encircled her with tender energy, and gazing with intereſting innocence in the fine face ſhe had ever contemplated with pure and holy delight, in a voice of touching melancholy, which thrilled through his frame, and revived the ardent emotions of a heart formed to adore her, ſhe cried—

"Dear, dear Sir Anſtruther, ſave me! Will you ſave all that is left of poor Benigna?"

"Save thee!" he repeated, the dignity of every virtuous paſſion imparting grandeur to his figure, and more than mortal graces to his manner—"ſave thee! yes, *once pure* and ever-matchleſs girl! at the expence of life, the hazard of Heaven! You will leave this baneful roof then, Benigna?" he added, all the energy of his intentions ſhining in his eyes; "you will

leave it for ever, and accept the aſylum I can *ſtill* offer you?"

"Yes, immediately, with you. But my mother——"

"Call not the wretch your mother; ſhe only prowls about, a fatal fiend, a deſtroying demon: ſhe never felt the throb of ſoft humanity, far leſs the kindly glow of maternal love. Come then, Benigna, leave all remembrances that can corrode——"

"My mother! leave her!—though——"

"Be not irreſolute; it grows late—come!"

Still ſhe heſitated, lingered, ſeemed to reflect, and then, heavily ſighing, would hide her face on his arm.

"Her poor mind wanders," ſaid Sir Anſtruther, mentally; "ruined excellence! undone lovelineſs! Yet I will "ſave *all* that is left of poor Benigna," ſaid he, repeating her own words, mournfully, in a repreſſed groan.

The

The ſounds ſtruck her ear—ſhe raiſed her head.

"I am ready, quite ready. Poor Patty ſaid you would take me to live the life of honor with me; and what life ſhould I live with my mother, if I—if—if——Oh indeed, I am ready!" ſhe added, ſtarting, and relapſing into wildneſs. "There—there he is! Take me!—take me!——"

"Eternal vengeance blight the remorſeleſs heart that thus reduced thy mind, ſo ſpotleſs, beauteous, ſo endearing once!—Oh for the coming hour! Sweet, undone Benigna, fear not any one! I am with you. I will lead you, ſupport you; lean on me!"

"I am quite ſtrong now," ſaid ſhe, weakly endeavouring to walk with firmneſs, and looking with ſoft, delighted gratitude on her beloved protector, "feel quite ſtrong on your arm; but can we get out?"

"Fear nothing, Benigna; I am with you!"

Unimpeded, and unſeen, they deſcended the ſtairs; but no ſooner had they entered the hall, than two or three wonderſtruck domeſtics, looking vacantly at each other, and deſtitute of power to intercept their paſſage themſelves, ſet up a loud cry, and —"Eſcape! eſcape!" reſounded through the lofty manſion.

Their alarm anſwered the purpoſe. Mrs. O'Connant inſtantly iſſued from a ſide parlour, and advanced to Sir Anſtruther with a fawning, ſycophantic grin upon her maſculine countenance.

Meantime Sir Anſtruther graſped the handle of the half-opened door. Benigna clung with trembling terror to his arm; and as Mrs. O'Connant would have taken her hand, ſaying—"My Benigna—my own child!" the fury of his look appalled her, and ſhe retreated.

"Woman!" cried Sir Anſtruther, with ſtrong repulſive contempt, "woman, begone, nor more moleſt this ruined angel!

I am

I am her guardian, and will juſtify this ſeizure."

In the vehemence of his deſire to ſhield Benigna from the touch ſhe ſeemed to ſhrink from with ſuch horror, he had extended his hand, by which means ſhe loſt her hold of his ſuſtaining arm; and unfortunately at that very inſtant of time the dreaded, terrific form of John O'Connant appearing by the ſide of her mother, the affrighted girl, uttering a ſhriek of frenzied horror, darted through the opened door, and ſwift as the lightning's flaſh, with wildneſs in her form, diſorder in every geſture, and ſtrange fears aching at her beating breaſt, ſhe ruſhed through the ſtreets, unknowing where to ſeek a ſhelter, or to find a friend.

CHAP. XX.

DRIVEN by the wildneſs of deſpair and terror, the poor Benigna, heedleſs of her way, flew through the labyrinth of ſtreets which ſurrounded her mother's dwelling.

It was a calm, dark night, towards the end of January; the air was mildly gloomy, and the ſhops being cloſed, the ſtreets were beginning to clear of the buſy, buſtling multitude; already had the clock ſtruck the hour of eleven, and the guardians of the night, as they patrolled along, though accuſtomed to ſurvey the outcaſt, wandering

ing daughters of ſhame and diſſipation, as a lamp now-and-then diſcovered the melancholy wildneſs of Benigna's pale, yet beautiful face, drew a ſigh of pity from their honeſt boſoms, that one ſo lovely ſhould be among the houſeleſs children of wretchedneſs!

Meantime, the innocent wanderer purſued her way without either motive or method. A ſtranger to the metropolis and its various deceptive arts to enthral the unwary, had ſhe even poſſeſſed all her natural fortitude and energy of action, ſhe would have ſenſibly felt the dangers to which ſhe was expoſed; but now, ſlowly recovering from illneſs, every faculty impaired, and her once quick perceptive mind reduced to nearly infantile weakneſs, a ſuperſtitious horror overwhelmed her, and ſhe could only look up to heaven with inexpreſſible anguiſh, then gaze on the earth with helpleſs deſpondency.

The air had revived her ſpirits, though walking had reduced her ſtrength, when,

finding herſelf on a bridge, ſhe gladly availed herſelf of a ſeat, to take a moment's reſpite from fatigue. She raiſed her languid eyes with the holy ardor of confiding thought; and though ſhe uttered nothing, her pure and innocent ſpirit was in ſweet commune with the friend of the friendleſs: inſenſibly a ſacred calm diffuſed itſelf over her ſenſes, and a ſerene confidence, which the unaccuſing boſom will feel even in the moſt gloomy extremities of fate, communicated a divine conſolation to her drooping ſoul; and, as if the angelic whiſpers of ſome miniſtering being had inſpired and fortified her with hope, ſhe aroſe from the bench.

"*He* who guards the innocent," ſaid ſhe, "will neither ſlumber nor ſleep, and I ſhall not be loſt."

She proceeded till ſhe reached the Surry ſide of Weſtminſter Bridge, when, through the darkening gloom, ſhe perceived a female figure before her. She quickened her pace, and came up with a young woman, who appeared

appeared as little able as accuſtomed to carry the bundle ſhe bore.

Benigna's heart palpitated; it was the criſis of her fate, when, gathering courage from her deſpair, ſhe approached the ſtranger, and in tremulous, apprehenſive accents entreated leave to walk beſide her.

"With pleaſure," ſaid the ſtranger, in a voice of mildneſs; "we are equally fortunate in going the ſame way, for the hour is not the moſt proper for women of decency to walk the ſtreets; but Neceſſity," added ſhe, ſighing, "has many ſad laws, though the adage ſays ſhe has none."

Wearied with a long, diſagreeable walk, and incommoded with her bundle, Benigna's nocturnal friend had not as yet caſt one glance at her companion; but at the cloſe of her remark, the glare of a large patent lamp falling on her, at once diſcovered her glittering habit, diſordered hair, and aſhy intereſting face; and though one of the moſt unſuſpicious of God's creatures herſelf, it occurred to her modeſt mind

mind that ſhe muſt be one of the impure ſiſterhood, either intoxicated or inſane: her figure, indeed, bore every appearance of it, and perfectly juſtified the thought.

"Beautiful unfortunate!" thought the pitying ſtranger, "ſome heart has mourned, may be ſtill mourning thy fall from happineſs and honor—and yet how innocent ſhe looks!—Oh man, man, man! deceptive and deſtructive man!"

She ventured another look at the unfortunate, when perceiving her totter under ill-concealed weakneſs, ſhe offered the ſupport of her arm.

"You bear too much already," ſaid Benigna, feebly. "Pray let me relieve you, and carry your bundle a little."

"She may run away with it," whiſpered Suſpicion.

"Oh Lavater! thou wouldſt have truſted that countenance, and ſo would I," mentally ſaid the ſtranger; "but thou art heavily loaded already, nor will I add one grain to the grievous weight."

Benigna's

Benigna's arm was now within her new-found friend's: the cauſe was indefinable; it might be ſympathy, for the fibre which unites congenial minds is the fineſt ligament in human nature.

"You need the comfort of a cheerful fire," ſaid the ſtranger, preſſing Benigna's hand, which felt cold and tremulous.

A deep ſigh was the only anſwer.

"Your mother, if you have one, muſt be trembling for the ſafety of ſuch a daughter at this hour?"

"Oh no, indeed!"

"Your friends, then!—they muſt anxiouſly expect you?"

"I have none!"

"Where is your home?"

"I have no home!" anſwered the wretched Benigna, her voice ſinking fainter and fainter at each reply.

"No friends!—no home!—Father of Mercy and the miſerable!—where then, poor young creature, are you going? where ſhall I lead you?"

"Take

"Take me," cried the trembler, her heart ſinking, "take me with you!"

"With me! Who, or what are you?"

"Nothing—nobody—I am—I am——"

A convulſive ſhudder ſeemed to ſhake the frail tenure of attenuated life, and choked the reſt. She could have ſunk from the kindly arms that ſuſtained her, and without a ſigh reſigned a weary, hopeleſs being; but ſhe reflected, to die in the ſtreet—to have her modeſt form expoſed, unowned, and almoſt without the rites of ſepulture, conſigned to pariſh earth!—the pride of decency revolted from the ſad humiliating thought. Nature made one powerful effort. She ſtruggled for utterance, gaſped for breath, and at length, in low, impreſſive accents, ſhe repeated the ſupplication—"Oh take me with you!" adding, "I will ſerve you, bleſs you—take me, take me with you!"

The ſoft, the ſad monotony of her words penetrated the gentle boſom ſhe wiſhed to intereſt, when, confuſed and agitated, ſhe

claſped

claſped her hands in wild indeciſion, and thereby dropped her bundle. Benigna's ſupport was now gone; ſhe ſtaggered, took up the bundle, and bent her humbled head before the irreſolute ſtranger.

The darkneſs of the night had increaſed; her form, but for the white drapery, was hardly viſible; but the heavy palpitations of her throbbing heart, and her ſhort, quickened breathings announced the ſuſpenſive agony of her ſpotleſs ſpirit.

"Abandoned guilt, with ſuch a form as this," thought the ſtranger, "would not ſupplicate a *female's* charity.

"Poor thing! What can I do?"

At that moment two men approached them with haſty ſteps and in eager converſation. The Iriſh accent was ſtrong upon their tongue, and from the deathlike ſtillneſs of the night could be diſtinctly heard. It was a fearful ſound to Benigna; it vibrated on her heart with horror, and as it magnified her danger upon imagination, increaſed

increaſed the ardor of her prayer for refuge.

"Only one night—one hour, take me with you!" reiterated ſhe, falling on her knees.

The men paſſed them with a low, brutal comment, and Benigna continued—

"Are you a mother?"

"I am indeed!" replied the ſtranger, feelingly.

"Have you a daughter?"

"Yes, a little infant."

"Think you ſee *her* as *I am!*"

"Oh God! my Madeline! What a thought was that! Come with me—irreſiſtible, myſterious pleader, come with me!"

"Bleſſed being! this deed of mercy hath ſecured thee an eternity of joy! My friend—my angel!"

Benigna ceaſed; her tranſports ſuſpended further ſpeech, and while a ſerene, inexplicable pleaſure dilated the generous boſom which

which gave to helpleſſneſs an honorable refuge, they preſſed each other's arm with the fervor of congenial worth, and in ſatiſfied ſilence reached the lowly dwelling of Mrs. Montgomery.

A low rap announced her welcome arrival. She was ſeldom out ſo late; but it was Saturday night, and ſhe had been detained by what the ſons and daughters of penury may be able to diſcover without the gift of divination, or having recourſe to magic.

They were admitted to a ſmall, neat dining-room, perfectly clean, but without the leaſt pretenſion to coſt or elegance. An agreeable young girl was ſeated at work, and three children, blooming as cherubim, lay in the ſweeteſt ſlumbers in an adjoining room, the door of which ſtood open, to admit the air more freely.

On their entrance, Mrs. Montgomery led her poor wanderer to an arm-chair next the fire; but ſhe ſunk from it on her knees, and, in a tranſport of gratitude, poured forth

forth the effuſions of her innocent heart; then, ſuddenly ſtarting on her feet, and claſping her hands in wild ecſtacy, ſhe cried—

"I am ſheltered—I am ſafe! But where—where—which is the angel, the Madeline? That dear name bore the charm—let me feel her—preſs her—bleſs her, and then I am eaſy—will be calm—be every thing you pleaſe!"

Mrs. Montgomery, while a tear of the brighteſt water ſparkled in her eye, and a ſentiment of the moſt luxurious nature ſwelled her ſatisfied heart, went to the bed, and ſleeping as ſhe was, laid the little cherub Madeline in Benigna's arms.

"Sweeteſt, loveliеſt bloſſom!" exclaimed the charming girl, the richeſt glow of enthuſiaſtic feeling ſuffuſing her faded cheek; "beloved infant! throughout a happy, honored, lengthened life, may thy innocence never know the ſharpened trials, the keen ſorrows of Benigna! but

be

be thy infancy a pleaſure, thy youth a bleſſing to thy virtuous mother!—Deareſt, beſt of women!" ſhe continued, turning her ſweet eyes on her friend, "but for your mercy, where, what ſhould I have been? I could have thanked you once, for I *had* ſenſe and feeling; but I loſt them all when I found my mother."

Benigna's colour heightened as ſhe ſpoke, her eyes acquired a mournful wildneſs, and Mrs. Montgomery, alarmed at her increaſing emotion, entreated ſhe would diſmiſs every unpleaſant remembrance, and aſſured her ſhe would be her friend, her ſiſter—a mother, till ſhe found a happier protection, and after ſhe found it, if it gave her pleaſure.

The heart of Benigna was compoſed of the fineſt, ſofteſt materials; the generous kindneſs of the ſtranger, the gentle attention of the wondering girl, and the bewitching lovelineſs of the little infant, who ſtill repoſed in her arms, with the quiet, the content, and ſimplicity of every thing

CHAP. XXI.

IT may probably be remembered that the high-ſpirited Lady Aveline was carried by her offended Lord, while fainting, into the travelling-coach, then in waiting; and, on recovering ſenſe and motion, ſhe found herſelf ſupported on the boſom of Mrs. Winbolt, who was chafing her temples, and applying volatiles: while Lord Aveline, wrapped in a cold and ſullen reſerve, ſat gloomily ruminating in a corner, apparently every way unconcerned about her indiſpoſition.

Lady

Lady Aveline looked around her, when, exaſperated at the cutting indifference of her Lord, a tide of indignation roſe in her boſom, and, with proud reſentment in her voice and manner, ſhe demanded where he was taking her.

Nothing moved, he made the replication—

"Where my pleaſure orders."

Euphemia felt he was inflexible, and that reſiſtance was vain; but diſdaining the further attentions of her houſekeeper, a total ſilence enſued for a conſiderable time.

The carriage drove with rapidity, nor once ſtopped for refreſhment till break of day, when his Lordſhip commanded the ſervants to draw up to a lonely houſe, which bore the appearance of an obſcure inn.

It was ſituated near the ſea, whoſe foaming billows were then daſhing on the beach; a little way from ſhore appeared a ſmall veſſel, ſomething reſembling a packet-boat, into which, after a hurried repaſt, of which

ſhe would not partake, the irritated Euphemia was conducted. A violent ſickneſs ſoon ſeized her; ſhe retired to bed, and unnoticed by her Lord, and ill attended by Winbolt, who ſuffered in an inferior degree herſelf, ſhe ſpent a lingering day and very boiſterous night, when the noiſy vociferations on deck announced the voyage over, and they rode at anchor. A poſtchaiſe was then procured; and ſuch was the ſpeed with which they travelled over fearful precipices and ſtupendous cliffs, and ſo rapid the ſucceſſion of contending emotions in Lady Aveline's mind, that the whirl of thought, and agitation of frame had in no way ſubſided, when the chaiſe drove up to the drawbridge of an old heavy Gothic building, which diſcovered the gloomy remains of ancient magnificence in its mouldering decay.

They were admitted by a ponderous portcullis to a wide paved court; and as her Ladyſhip ſurveyed the heavy battlements and darkened towers, ſome ivied, and others blackened

blackened by the hand of Time, ſhe felt the moſt ſaddened images flit acroſs her breaſt.

The edifice, which roſe in ſolitary grandeur, was ſurrounded by a deep moat, that at once ſecured the inmates from the invaſion of unwiſhed obtruders, and precluded all poſſibility of eſcape. The antique chambers were large and ghaſtly in the extreme; and an impreſſive, deathlike ſilence pervaded the whole, which ſhed a deeper gloom over the heavy ſolitude.

Such was the manſion deſtined for the reſidence of the gay, pleaſure-loving Lady Aveline.

The gardens were extenſive, and wildly beautiful; but ſo neglected, and overgrown with underwood, thorns, and thiſtles, as to nearly preclude the feet of the obtruding paſſenger, and ill accorded with the light, airy, elegant taſte of the immured miſtreſs of the gloomy domain.

The houſehold conſiſted of Mrs. Winbolt, two rude ruſtic wenches to do the drudgery, an errand-boy, and a favourite black ſlave, whom Lord Aveline had brought with him ſeveral years before from the Weſt Indies.

Mrs. Winbolt had never cultivated the favor of her Lady; ſhe had always ſtood low in her eſtimation; and, now conſidered as a ſpy upon her actions, and the gaoler of her perſon, was become her horror and deteſtation. Mrs. Winbolt, naturally preſuming, vain of her domeſtic abilities, and now inveſted with a degree of power and conſequence ſhe could never have expected, betrayed, though with crafty caution, the bad qualities of her heart; and there was a ſupercilioufneſs in her reſpect, and an air of arrogance in her manner, to which the ſpirit of Euphemia could never have ſubmitted even at the loweſt ebb of humiliation and miſery.

Lord

Lord Aveline appeared to have but one view—namely, to punish and degrade his wife. He was often absent for days and nights together, and when at home, his silence, sullenness, and contemptuous indifference imbittered her heavy days, and gave anguish to her solitary nights. She had no amusement nor recreation; she had no refuge for her afflictions, no alleviation for her despair; she was immured she knew not where, and among she knew not whom; to their language she was a stranger, her signs were misunderstood, her sorrows were unlamented, and Euphemia was receiving at the hands of her Lord double for all her transgressions; only with the friendly black she held communication—only from him she received that commiserative deference which alleviates, without wounding, the sensible spirit: his respect was gratifying, his attentions were delicate and unobtrusive.

The nature of Africanus was kind, grateful, and benevolent. Uncultivated by

education, and untutored by the refinements of art, he poſſeſſed thoſe daring and ardent paſſions which, under proper regulations, fortify, enlarge, and exalt the human mind.

To Lord Aveline he owed a life of gratitude and reverence, and every day fidelity and attachment were paying off the mighty debt, until he beheld, young, lovely, neglected, and miſerable, the enchanting Euphemia; and then it *firſt* occurred to Africanus that his Lord was mortal, could be unmerciful, and apparently unjuſt.

On their arrival at the ſequeſtered reſidence, his Lordſhip, in a voice firm and ſevere, while inflexibility ſat frowning on his gloomy brow, commanded Africanus to attend him.

"You owe me," ſaid he—but it was uttered in impreſſive, not upbraiding accents, "you owe me life and liberty, and ſomething more, good Africanus; wear them with fidelity, and enjoy them; nor, on the peril of theſe ſacred treaſures being loſt for ever,

ever, be tempted to diſpute or diſobey my orders. It is my will to here confine my wife. She may meditate eſcape; but mind me—if by thought, or word, or action, direct or indirect, you are tempted, or intimidated to betray my truſt, and aid her, all you hold of me is forfeited. You know me ſtern, immutable; be warned then, and remember!"

Africanus bowed, would have ſpoke, plighted a ſolemn vow, but his Lordſhip interrupted him.

"Forbear, Africanus!" ſaid he; "if you can betray your friend, you can affront your God!—no more!"

Narrow, indeed, was the ſphere of Lady Aveline's enjoyments, when they were confined to the humble exertions of a poor untutored ſlave, whoſe organ of ſpeech, in broken ſentences, could inarticulately convey his meaning; yet there was a humility and meekneſs in his voice, and a ſimplicity and unſtudied wiſh to pleaſe in his manner, that called forth the better feelings of the

Africanus, in the courſe of that cruel traffic which degrades humanity, was purchaſed, at an early age, by an opulent Weſt Indian planter, whoſe nature hardened as his wealth increaſed.

He was daring, unprincipled, and proud, avaricious, cruel, and revengeful; and, with every viler paſſion burning, unreſtrained, within his blackened heart, he governed his ſlaves with a rod of iron, delighted in the infliction of his arbitrary power, and impiouſly pronounced the ſable unfortunates created for his purpoſes and pleaſures.

Africanus was a tall, well-proportioned figure; and though his darkened countenance diſplayed the ſtrong emboldened feature of his character and nation, there was a qualifying mildneſs in his ſimple unſtudied manner that attached the good heart, and improved on the underſtanding.

He had completed his twenty-fifth year, and had ſerved his thankleſs, unbending maſter

maſter with zeal, aſſiduity, and faithfulneſs from liſping infancy, when the Deity, which aſſerts his power alike over the heart of a Monarch and his loweſt vaſſal, the maſter and his meaneſt ſlave, inſpired his breaſt with his fierceſt fires, and he became enamoured of the gentle, modeſt Nona, daughter to a friendly neighbour, groaning under the ſame galling bondage as himſelf.

Nona was low in ſtature, yet formed with the moſt delicate proportion; her teeth rivalled the ivory in whiteneſs; and while her eyes, full, large, and piercing, beamed with love and ſoftneſs on Africanus, the ſilver tones of her voice ſounded like the ſweeteſt muſic on his delighted ear: their affection was fervid, their wiſhes mutual, and their ſimplicity rendered them as pure. They were betrothed, and Africanus only waited to get a promiſed piece of land for his own cultivation, to carry Nona a bride to his own hut, when her pretty little figure attracted the notice of their lawleſs, impe-

rious maſter. The moſt deteſted and unrelenting of paſſions uſurped the name of *love* in his degraded boſom; and being voluptuous enough to prefer a willing, rather than an enforced, ſacrifice, he vouchſafed to intimate the honor he intended poor Nona.

"Nona no love Maſſa—Nona love Africanus," was the poor being's ſimple reply.

He condeſcended to remonſtrate—Africanus was a ſlave, ſhe muſt labor with him.

"Nona ſlave too, and labor too for Maſſa *with* Africanus."

The ſoftneſs of Nona's voice, the melting of her eyes as ſhe ſpoke, ſtill more inflamed her licentious libertine maſter.

"You ſhall not work, Nona—you ſhall live in my houſe, have ſlaves to attend you, and have beads and rings—every thing you like, only love me, pretty Nona!"

Neither the temptations of idleneſs and the fine houſe, nor beads, nor rings, nor any thing could ſhake the faithful affection of Nona.

Nona

Nona could only love Africanus; she would live *with* him, she would die *for* him, and as soon as possible their betrothment was completed; and while she was enduring the assailing offers of her dreaded master, a little pledge of their fondness throbbed within the faithful breast of Nona.

The passion of their vile, unprincipled tyrant had attained its horrid climax; and, determined on the completion of his barbarous, savage purpose, he one morning, on setting out to visit a more remote plantation, left orders for Nona to attend his pleasure in a retired summer-house that very evening, on peril of the severest chastisement for disobedience.

This message struck like bolts of ice on her fainting heart, and enfrenzied the very soul of Africanus. Such was his agony, his revenge, that he would have plunged the dagger in his breast, and exulted in the pangs of punishment, but Nona would be implicated, exposed to danger, perhaps, as an

an accomplice, doomed to ignominious death; and, as the only despairing alternative that could suspend their horror, and protract the evil hour of malign destiny, they flew to the woods, and took refuge in one of those beautiful and commodious chasms, or caves, with which the western hemisphere abounds, and there, upon wild fruits, herbs, and what game Africanus could take by stratagem, they lived till Nona gave being to a little Africanus.

Meantime the rage, disappointment, and vengeance of their master were incontrollable; they exceeded all bounds, and many of their sooty brethren had to rue the loves of Nona and her Africanus. Immense rewards were offered for their apprehension, for Africanus dead—for Nona living; but all proved ineffectual; no tidings of the fugitives arrived to allay the swell of passion, which, as it gathered, burst in torture on some poor unsinning being in his possession: and his capricious cruelties would have half depopulated his plantations, but that an

unexpected

unexpected circumstance occurred, which gave a different turn to his unsleeping passions.

CHAP. XXII.

SOME Englishmen of distinction had arrived on the island, with whose connections this planter had large commercial dealings, and who, consequently, had particular claims on his hospitality and attentions.

To gratify a strong inclination they expressed for a party on the water, and, if possible, to divert his own torturing thoughts from their dire object, he prepared a superb gondola, and one fine morning, with the

the ſofteſt breeze, they embarked to viſit ſome natural grottos which, with ſurpaſſing beauty, adorned the beach of a bold and rapid river.

They had examined all that was deemed worthy of admiration or notice, and partook of a ſumptuous repaſt, when ſome of the party, whoſe fancies were more excurſive than the reſt, propoſed a ramble in the upland woods, the wild and pictureſque beauty of which invited the admiring and curious traveller to penetrate their devious mazes.

Lord Aveline, ever an enthuſiaſt in his attachments, and whoſe perſevering nature admitted no poſſible barrier to impede his deſigns, had accompanied a young gentleman, whoſe preſence was neceſſary to take poſſeſſion of a large property on the iſland. This friend's conſtitution was very delicate; and if not properly and carefully attended, was too likely to fall a ſacrifice to the unwholeſome heats of the climate. Lord Aveline, therefore, in the ſpirit of chivalric friendſhip,

friendſhip, embarked with him, and was at once his companion and his nurſe; and in *this* memorable party, formed chiefly for their gratification by Mr. Wilding, none were ſo deſirous of the foreſt excurſion as Lord Aveline and his friend.

The planter, cowardly from the conſciouſneſs of deſerving evil, and knowing there *was* danger in the woods, without a ſtrong body to repel aſſault, would have declined it; but without betraying what he ſtudiouſly concealed from ſtrangers, he could form no pretext, and they proceeded.

They had penetrated a conſiderable way into the wilds, when Lord Aveline, in gathering ſome curious plants, perceived, almoſt coeval with the bruſh-wood, a cave of moſt extraordinary beauty and ſingular conſtruction; it appeared circular, and around the cavity grew the moſt odoriferous ſhrubs and luxurious moſſes. With admiring wonder, he approached to examine the interior, and was followed by the whole

whole party. From the lowneſs of the receſs, they were obliged to enter on their knees; but it gradually roſe in conic form, as they proceeded.

The beams of a vertical ſun obliquely darted acroſs the mouth of the cave, and partially irradiating the interior, the walls ſhone with a bright variety of the moſt vivid colours; while, from every jutting fragment of the rock, hung delicious ſhrubs and cluſters of ſhells. The floor appeared ſtrewn with a glittering humid duſt, which Lord Aveline conſidering with the attention of a naturaliſt, was carefully depoſiting ſome of it in his pocket-book; but while thus buſied, he ſuddenly ſtarted, which communicating alarm to all in the rear, of either a ſavage or ſome ferocious animal, they, precipitately as poſſible, retreated—all but Mr. Wilding, whom terror tranſfixed to the ſpot, and induced to graſp the neck of Lord Aveline with ſuch violence as to put him in danger of ſuffocation: but he ſoon releaſed his Lordſhip from the cloſe embrace,

embrace, for, caſting his eyes around, in a voice which reverberating echo ſounded to the remoteſt corner of the ſpacious chaſm, he cried—

" By G—d and vengeance, my fugitive ſlaves!"

Upon a couch of moſs and leaves, a little towards the right of the cave, reclined the poor Nona, her little infant at her breaſt, and her faithful Africanus, with looks of watchful, anxious love, hanging over her.

Lord Aveline had heard their ſimple tale—from many a gentle heart that pitied their woes, he had heard it; and as his own ſwelled with indignation towards their cruel oppreſſor, the wiſh to extricate them from his barbarity ſprung up, and ſtrengthened.

The moment eventful to them all was come; the fate of the lovers hung by a ſingle hair. Mr. Wilding's exclamation on the diſcovery, having recalled the company and attending ſlaves, he commanded them

them to bind the culprits and their imp, and chain them to the veſſel till he conſidered what their puniſhment ſhould be.

"My curioſity, Mr. Wilding," ſaid his Lordſhip, the glow of ſenſibility ſpreading over his fine manly features as he ſpoke, and repulſed the advance of the obedient ſlaves—"my curioſity muſt not prove fatal to theſe miſerable victims of human traffic."

"It does not, my Lord; their fate, when found, was long ago decided."

"It is not decided even now," cried Lord Aveline; "you muſt make me their maſter. Name their ranſom—it is your's."

"A million ſhould not purchaſe the wench!" replied the planter, every viler paſſion darkening his hardened viſage—"not a million!—For the fellow——"

"Death," interrupted Africanus, emboldened by riſing agony, "death no divide Nona—me——"

"Strike the villain down!" vociferated the enraged maſter to his ſlaves.

"They

"They muſt lay me proſtrate firſt," added his Lordſhip, ſhielding the ſable *trio* from their approach. "Name your terms, Mr. Wilding; they muſt be mine!"

"*Muſt!* my Lord!"

"*Muſt*, Mr. Wilding, by an obligation you cannot diſſolve—by humanity!"

The maſter of the poor trembling blacks was no caſuiſt; he neither offered, nor could refute an argument, but replied, in the language of his barbarous commerce—

"They are my property—they are mine!"

"Your's!" repeated his Lordſhip, a generous indignation ſwelling his majeſtic form—"your's! Did you give them breath? Did you give them ſoul?—No! Elſe you could direct its movements, and would delight in its felicity."

"I do not underſtand your Lordſhip," ſaid Mr. Wilding, with rather a rude impatience. "Let us begone; they are mine—I will not ſell them!"

"You ſhall!"

"Shall!" reiterated the planter, with kindling fury, and without thinking either of Shakeſpeare or his Shylock, repeated—"ſhall! By what compulſion muſt I?—Tell me that."

"By *that* which may hereafter procure yourſelf what you too likely will much want—mercy! But as you men of traffic ſometimes prefer ready-money to bills of exchange, I again offer you prompt payment. Name your terms!"

An air of reſolution had diffuſed itſelf over the countenance of Lord Aveline, which informed Mr. Wilding that the power of capitulation was all he could in the preſent inſtance boaſt; and, therefore, at the inſtigation of avarice, and in the delighting idea of wringing the ſoul that had preſumed to reject his favors, he replied—

"To oblige his Lordſhip, five hundred pounds ſhould purchaſe Africanus and the child. The wench," and his eyes gleamed with the horrid fire of a paſſion from which female decency revolts, "the wench will

be ſafe; *ſhe* bears a qualifying *charm* about her that ſecures a pardon;—yes, ſhe is ſafe!"

"Nona no leave——"

The wretched being ceaſed; ſhe could no more, but gaſping, breathleſs, ſhe threw herſelf at Lord Aveline's feet, and ceaſed to reſpire.

"Support your wife, Africanus," cried his Lordſhip.—"Mr. Wilding, they ſhall not be parted; they are mine. My fortune, my life to emancipate them from their galling chain!"

"Your life, then, expiate ſuch daring!" replied the furious planter, prudence, reaſon deſerting him, "perdition blaſt the arm that ſpares, or riſes to aſſiſt you!"

As he uttered his imprecation, he aimed a deadly blow at the noble breaſt, whoſe every fibre was ſtrung by valor, whoſe every pulſe beat with the generoſities of an elevated ſpirit; but he was corpulent and inactive—his Lordſhip agile, quick, and alert; and though no pugiliſt, by one

one well-directed ſtroke, he levelled the tyrant ſenſeleſs with the earth, and before reanimation invigorated the body, and revived the inhuman paſſions of his ſoul, he ordered his ſlaves to attend him, and, aſſiſted by his friends, bore Africanus, Nona, and their infant to the gondola, and on their arrival at Jamaica, by a ſhip under ſail, inſtantly embarked them for England.

Before his Lordſhip quitted the cabin, where he commended the ſable family to the Captain's care and protection until his own return to Britain, they proſtrated themſelves in humble, grateful reverence before their noble deliverer, while, in incoherent, almoſt unintelligible accents, the poor black poured forth his artleſs effuſions—

"Africanus die—Nona die—child die—all die—you—you good—you *God here*, what do for you?"

"Children of miſery!" cried his Lordſhip, ſtrongly affected by their ſimple expreſſions

expreſſions of gratitude, and raiſing them, "I am but a man: my higheſt glory is, that I boaſt the feelings of a man. You are reſcued—are ſafe; be faithful, then, and honeſt to your friend."

"God know—God hear! Look! God ſee in that cloud, if no good, no true, ſend again to Maſſa to die, to be tear from Nona!"

It was an agreement of ſoul, a compact of mind, regiſtered in the annals of ſentiment, enrolled in the records of humanity; angels witneſſed the deed with exultation, and Heaven vouchſafed the promiſe of remuneration. The veſſel with the triumphant ſlaves bore away for a happier land; while Lord Aveline, ſelf-ſatiſfied and ſelf-approved, returned to the iſland, to await the decree of juſtice.

Mr. Wilding was univerſally deteſted—his principles univerſally condemned: his opulence gave him the conſequence which opulence *can* purchaſe, and that was all the diſtinctions he could boaſt.

Lord Aveline's evidence was clear; his aſſault on Mr. Wilding was proved *ſelf-defence*, and he was ſentenced by the Court to pay the Planter the *juſt*, fair, reaſonable price of a man, a woman, and an infant of colour.

His Lordſhip bowed to the worthy diſtributors of juſtice; and amid the acclamations and bleſſings of aſſembled thouſands, he quitted the Court, and in a few days after the country.

Few, if any, hailed his return to his native ſoil with more genuine and exquiſite tranſports of joy than the poor creatures his mercy had redeemed from bondage and impending tortures; yet his philanthropy ſtopped not there: he had them baptized, inſtructed in the tenets which give dignity to human nature, and a claim to an eternal inheritance; and then ſettled on them a ſmall annuity, and alſo inveſted them with a piece of ground to cultivate by induſtry for their united ſupport.

Thus

Thus, rich in enjoyments, tranſcending all their imagination could have conceived, were Africanus and his Nona, when Lord Aveline commanded him, as one in whom he could undoubtingly confide, to attend him, promiſing, when he could ſuit himſelf with one equally confidential, and firm in duty, to reſtore him to his happy home and cheerful avocations.

There was a ſtern determination, an unbending ſeverity in his Lordſhip's countenance and manner, when intimating his will on this occaſion, that intimidated even the high and fearleſs ſpirit of Africanus; and unable to form any conjecture as to the nature of his myſterious duty, in ſilent awe he followed the ſteps of his now ſeverely haughty maſter. Gratitude, working on his imagination, had elevated his deliverer to a God; and it was only when ſurveying the uncomplaining ſufferings of the unheeded, forſaken Euphemia, that he began to doubt his infallibility, and

read the inflictions of an offended and avenging mortal.

Such, then, was the character to whom Lady Aveline, in the repeated abſences of her Lord, was entruſted—ſuch the being to whom ſhe owed her whole of comfort in her ſolitary, forſaken condition.

CHAP. XXIII.

MRS. Montgomery was deſcended from ſome of the higheſt and the proudeſt of the Scottiſh clans, and retained a ſtrong caſt of all the virtues and prejudices of her warlike anceſtors. Bred to elegance, in the boſom of parental tenderneſs, ſhe was but

but ill calculated to ſuſtain the hardſhips and difficulties of her ſucceeding fate: at the early age of eighteen, time, the ſword, and a relentleſs deſtiny, had deprived her of all, "*ſave innocence and Heaven.*"

She was an intereſting, helpleſs, iſolated being; her haughty kindred, ſtanding in a remote degree, allowed her not the endearing claims ſuch worth and unſheltered lovelineſs had upon their protection and ſupport; and after having ſtruggled ſome few years with her wayward deſtiny, Fortune, or Misfortune, introduced her to Captain Montgomery. Gay, handſome, ardent, and perſevering, he wooed the maid, and won her. His own income was limited and confined; but his dependancies were promiſing, his expectations brilliant, for he had a fond, indulgent father in the Eaſt-Indies, diſtinguiſhed in rank, and opulent in circumſtances.

He entirely approved of his ſon's union with the fair Scottiſh laſs; and had he lived, perhaps the roſes of felicity might have

ſtrewn that path in which the ill-fortuned pair only found the thorns of rugged, rude adverſity.

General Montgomery fell in a duel; and his will being tranſmitted, it appeared that he had bequeathed his ſon twenty thouſand pounds. But how deluſive is hope! how futile expectation! how defective is human enjoyment! The ſhips of the ſucceeding ſeaſon brought the diſtreſſing intelligence that the General, ſome months before his death, had withdrawn all his property; and how diſpoſed of it was unknown, but he died inſolvent.

Youth, mutual affection, buoyant ſpirits, and high connections, in a little time might have ſurmounted the evil; and ſuch was the intereſt their talents, lovelineſs, and misfortunes excited, that independence would have been their own in a ſupereminent degree; but thoſe friends the ſhining qualities of Captain Montgomery acquired, his haughty, inconſiderate, volatile nature loſt.

Misfortunes

Misfortunes and indiſcretions kept a ſaddened pace, till improvidence at home, and diſſipated profuſeneſs abroad, reduced the family to the loweſt ebb of human wretchedneſs; and it was then the ſuffering wife repreſſed the diffidence and retiring timidity of her nature, and had recourſe to thoſe imaginary delineations ſo generally read, for the ſupport of her infant family.

The fond, afflicted, unfortunate Madeline ſtill concealed and juſtified, juſtified and concealed, the imprudences of him ſhe loved, till the generous few who patronized her, and aided her ſtruggles, implicated her in his follies, and one by one dropped off.

Humiliated, agonized, and forlorn, ſhe alternately wept and murmured, upbraided and implored; ſometimes the remonſtrance was received with indifference, at others with impatience, but always concluded with haughty anger on one ſide and ſilent anguiſh on the other.

Oh Love! thou tender, ſenſitive bloſſom! how feebly doſt thou ſtand the chilling blights of penury—the nipping froſts of diſappointment! Yet Madeline would have cheriſhed thee in a warm and tender boſom, ſheltered thee from the *gloom* of ſorrow, and treaſured thee in death! To her thou couldſt have cheered the thorny, dreary path of life, ſoftened a dying hour, and bloomed immortal in the faireſt paradiſe of God!

But Henry did not feel thy genuine charm, thy ſweetly powerful influence, and the ſoft attributes of Madeline's breaſt received a deadly wound. Frigid indifference ſoon chilled the energy of affection, haughty reſerve deſtroyed generous confidence, and that vivid ſentiment which had animated her actions, enlivened her thoughts, and gave a glow of cheerfulneſs to her converſation, was all caſt back upon her hands; for the boſom ſhe had ſelected as a refuge from every ſtorm, a ſanctuary from every affliction, rejected the tender claims, and

ſacrificed

ſacrificed its energy at the ſhrine of another: and that delighted duty, that hallowed obedience, ſo long the offspring of tenderneſs, at length became the cold reſult of principle; but as the fervid heart *muſt* have ſome object to beſtow its fervor on, ſhe gave to the children what no longer intereſted the father.

Thus were the thorns of anguiſh implanted in the pillow of ſanctified love, thus was withered the roſe of conjugal felicity, and thus mourned Madeline, a ſad, forſaken, humiliated wife!

At length deſcended the blow which decided the fate of Henry Montgomery.—Accompanied by ſome diſſipated acquaintance, he reſorted to a noted gaming-houſe; there he was traced by the Argus eyes of a relentleſs creditor, and in a few hours became the inmate of a priſon. Ever haughty and unbending, the dire calamity awoke no tender feeling, revived no fond remembrance, or, if it did, it faded where

it roſe, in the deep receſſes of a wounded ſpirit.

Days, weeks, and months elapſed; ſtill he lingered in a priſon—ſtill his wife endured the extremeſt anguiſh, difficulty, and reproach; no hope to animate exertion, no view to ſuſtain expectation;—loſt to themſelves, and all the nobler purſuits of being, with every error heightened, every folly magnified, pitied by ſome, accuſed by others, and reproached by more, a weary and melancholy exiſtence drew near its cloſe.

A fever, in an intenſely warm ſummer, broke out in the priſon, which almoſt vacated the gloomy manſion; and among the hapleſs victims fell the once gay, intereſting, generous, and happy Henry Montgomery!

Every error was now obliterated from the wretched widow's memory; every deſertion was forgiven, every unkindneſs eraſed—the gloom of death had emboſomed all, and only the generoſities of his glowing heart,

heart, and thoſe endearing virtues which even his follies could not obſcure, were treaſured by remembrance.

With trembling, feeble ſteps, ſhe ſought the gloomy manſion, where, cold and unconſcious, on an humble pallet, lay the pale relics of him her virgin heart had loved, approved, and reverenced; her little infants were around her, to take a laſt look, a laſt leave of their departed father.—The tears of the eldeſt dropped on the lifeleſs hands, the others ſighed, and were ſad, yet knew not why, unleſs that papa did not notice them; and a little baby in arms, ſmiling in infant eaſe, innocently played with the handle of the coffin, unconſcious that it was to bear a father to the gloomy manſions of a long and dreary night!

No tear ſoftened the ſorrow of Madeline—it was deep, ſilent, and laſting; ſhe knew herſelf friendleſs and a one in a peopled univerſe, no maternal boſom to

ſuſtain or comfort her, no paternal arm to defend or guide her.

She threw herſelf on her knees, and folded the cold form of him ſhe had ſo loved, to her faithful heart.

"No one will diſpute thee *now*," cried ſhe, wildly, "nor revel in thy ſmiles; yet is the boſom thou deſerted thy lateſt, laſt ſupport, and only in the arms of death was I allowed to claim and claſp thee. How gay, how fond, how happy have I ſeen thee! how high in hope and pleaſure! how fair in reputation, how generous, and how good I knew thee! Now!—now!"—and ſhe claſped her hands in the agony of recollection—"now thou art nothing; the grave will emboſom thee, and then thou art no more!—no longer mine, thou dear, devoted being!—never to ſee thee ſmile again! to hear thee ſpeak or breathe—I cannot bear it!"

The children crowded round her, kiſſed her lips, her cheeks, and hands, and, weeping,

weeping, told her ſhe looked as pale as poor papa; but begged her not to lay ſo cold and ſtill, elſe they muſt die too, for they had nobody but mama.

She preſſed them all to her beating heart, caſt her melancholy eyes on their dead father, and then on his living offspring: pent-up nature ſtruggled—ſhe burſt into tears.

"I will not leave you, my beloved children," ſhe cried;—"go, I will follow ſoon."

They retired; when, having prayed with fervor over the corpſe, and vowed to cheriſh his children, and honor his memory, ſhe bade a laſt farewel to her dear and early-fated Henry.

Oh Indiſcretion! this is thy triumph.—Oh Diſſipation! contemplate thy gloomy cloſe!

The firſt tranſports of Mrs. Montgomery's grief being abated, ſtern neceſſity compelled her to ſeriouſly conſider how ſhe was to ſupport and rear her children.

Her

Her ſtruggles were ſevere, her difficulties numerous; and imagination had painted the future in the darkeſt colourings of deſpair, when chance informed her Colonel Grambold was returning from the Eaſt-Indies; and having been the boſom-friend and aſſociate of her late father-in-law, might be able to develop the myſtery which involved his affairs, and alſo eſſentially benefit her and the children. The idea of this gentleman had been ſo long the ſolace of her deſponding moments, that it had interwoven itſelf with every brighter ſpeck that ſuſtained exiſtence; and ſhe felt, though reaſon condemned the viſionary dependance, that a diſappointment would reduce her to abſolute deſpair.

At length ſhe learned that the Colonel was arrived, but had been but a few nights in town, when the phyſicians ordered him to Bath, if poſſible to repair the ravages a burning clime and voluptuous indulgences had made on his conſtitution; and ſhe was obliged to repreſs impatience until his

his return to a ſuperb mānſion, preparing for his reception in Groſvenor Square.

Such was the ſituation of Mrs. Montgomery's affairs when Providence directed her ſteps, and inſpired her gentle commiſerative heart to yield protection to our poor wandering heroine; and though

> "For the due bread of the day
> "Deſtin'd to toil as well as pray,"

with cheerful delight, and benevolent pleaſure, ſhe invited Benigna to ſhare her pittance; and accept the protection of her lowly roof, until happier circumſtances reſtored her to the bolom of her benefactreſs.

"And you will, my ſweet young friend," continued Mrs. Montgomery, after having liſtened attentively to her intereſting hiſtory, "you will derive one advantage from my obſcurity; it will perfectly ſeclude you from the knowledge of any you may deſire to avoid, and at the ſame time we may eaſily

eaſily diſcover all we are intereſted to know."

Benigna, in the hoſpitable kindneſs, delicate attentions, and tender, improving counſels of Mrs. Montgomery, ſoon experienced a ſerenity and ſatisfaction to which ſhe had been a ſtranger from the time ſhe was bleſſed with the care and affection of her beloved Counteſs; and when her health and ſpirits were ſufficiently reſtored, ſhe aſſiſted her friend in all her little domeſtic offices, but was never ſo happy as when inſtructing the boys, or playing with her little darling Madeline.

In her ſociety Mrs. Montgomery found the moſt ſatisfied delight, and in her refined and elegant converſation, after the ſtruggles of the day were over, experienced the higheſt intellectual enjoyment.

"Our fare is very homely," ſhe would ſometimes ſay, in ſmiling compliment, to Benigna, "but you render the deſſert truly luxurious; and your preſent mortifications

and

and penance will give a charming zeſt to the future ſplendor and happineſs that my familiar tells me will yet be your fate; and truſt me, ſweet Benigna, they cannot enjoy the *comforts* of life who have only known its luxuries."

Mutually happy, and pleaſed in each other's increaſing eſteem, could Mrs. Montgomery have forgotten that on the precarious tenure of her health, life, and literary labors, depended the welfare of her darling children, and Benigna ceaſed to remember "that ſuch things were, and were moſt dear to her," and that beings walked on earth, who, if they could diſcover her retreat, would reduce her to a ſecond madneſs, they would have pronounced themſelves among the moſt contented of *humble* human beings.

"And why not among the *greateſt* of human beings?" ſays the contemplative reader, who juſtly appretiates the value of life.

Do

Do not confine happineſs to the elevated ranks, nor ſuppoſe the humble without their ſhare of comfort. Be it known to the proud and ambitious heart covered with the blazing ſtar, and the aching head encircled by the ſhining coronet, that there is often found in the poor man's lot a brighter ſpeck than irradiates the life of either.

CHAP. XXIV.

THE better to conceal Benigna from thoſe ſhe wiſhed to avoid, Mrs. Montgomery adviſed her to aſſume the name of Manſel;

Manſel; and as ſhe never went out unaccompanied, her nights paſſed unalarmed by fears, and her days undiſturbed by either inſult or apprehenſion.

At Benigna's requeſt, Mrs. Montgomery had been at the houſe of Lord Aveline, with an explanatory letter to her Ladyſhip; but the few domeſtics knew no more than that they had left England, and as their route was unknown, they could not undertake to tranſmit any letter.

This was a new ſource of vexation and regret to Benigna; for ſhe hoped, from the generoſity of Lady Aveline, to alleviate the preſſing wants of her amiable Mrs. Montgomery.

With timid ſweetneſs, and a delicate ſenſibility ſhining in her eyes, ſhe expreſſed an ardent wiſh to know where, and how Lord Ruthinglenne and Sir Anſtruther Buckingham were, and to ſatisfy the latter that ſhe was ſafe under honorable though obſcure protection, where ſhe ſhould remain till Lady Caſtledownne's return.

" Remembrance

"Remembrance is imperfect," ſhe added, a rich glow mantling over her cheek; "but I think he had formed ſtrange, unhappy notions of me, and yet teſtified ſo tender an intereſt in my ſufferings, that I ſhould feel a ſerene pleaſure in being juſtified in his opinion."

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Montgomery, ſmiling archly, "the approbation of the good is ſo very gratifying, that ſuppoſe I am your *avant courier*, and announce at once your innocence and ſafety."

Benigna preſſed her friend's hand in grateful ſilence to her lips, and Mrs. Montgomery loſt no time in making the neceſſary enquiries.

Alas! poor Benigna was deſtined to feel the pang of ſuſpenſive ſorrow. Lord Ruthinglenne was gone to the Continent, and appeared at his departure depreſſed in ſpirits, and reduced in health.

Sir Anſtruther Buckingham, with a party of friends, had taken an excurſion to the northern

northern Moors, and was not expected in town for ſeveral months.

" Poor Ruthinglenne!" ſaid Benigna, after a thoughtful pauſe, " *he* has not forgotten——Well! and Sir Anſtruther, it ſeems, is in health, and——" ſhe ſighed—" and can take pleaſure—but why not? How ſhould ſuch a thing as I am interrupt his enjoyments?"

Benigna formed wrong concluſions; circumſtances were miſrepreſented, for ſervants are not always acquainted with the intentions and deſtination of their maſters: and as it will further elucidate this hiſtory, we ſhall for a little while attend the perſonages who occupied the anxious thoughts of Benigna.

Sir Anſtruther Buckingham, in the firm idea of Benigna's preference for Lord Ruthinglenne, deduced the moſt powerful antidote to his paſſion. Her doubtful expreſſions he imputed to a vein of thoughtleſs coquetry; and conſidering her as his friend's affianced wife, rich in her love, diſtinguiſhed by her eſteem, his generous ſoul attached

a degree

a degree of enormity to the very thought of alienating her regard, or ſhaking her fidelity. Still her fair image, in many a recollected form and tender diſtreſs, would ruſh over his impaſſioned ſoul, on which memory would dwell enraptured till every oppoſing conſideration was loſt, and love and Benigna reigned triumphant in his boſom. Thus toſſed upon a whirl of painful conjecture, he by accident encountered Lord Ruthinglenne as he was ſetting out in the fond expectation of eſpouſing Benigna; exultation proudly ſparkled in his elated eye, and the triumph of a ſucceſsful lover could not be repreſſed.

"My wiſhes are at their higheſt ſummit," ſaid he; "joy mounts towards its climax. Benigna has found her mother, and—and ſhe is mine by love—by vows immutable is mine!"

A cold and painful palpitation ſeized the heart of Sir Anſtruther as the conquering rival ſpoke; but the blood ruſhed in wild and

and burning ſuffuſion to his face, and gave it the deepened hue of crimſon. Something he would have ſaid, but he felt choking; the violence of emotion precluded utterance, and in ſpeechleſs frenzy he broke away.

Time, however, in a little allayed the ſwell of pride and agony, and again the powerful energy of his mind returned; reflection ſubdued the tumult of the ſenſes, and abated the ferment of feeling.

The principled, upright mind will repreſs the paſſion which reaſon arraigns, and honor cannot juſtify. Benigna he now conſidered the wife of Ruthinglenne; and the moſt hallowed ſaint within her ſhrine was never held more ſacred by the devotee, than the virtue of a married woman by Sir Anſtruther Buckingham.

The powers of the human mind are of greater extent than is generally imagined; for when he recovered from the firſt ſhock ſuch unexpected intelligence had given him, he retired to a beautiful, romantic *cottage*

ornée he poſſeſſed ſome miles from Kingſton, and there, in the exerciſe of ever-active benevolence, blunted the keen edge of thoſe feelings he found it impoſſible to extirpate; his paſſion was too powerful, too bright to be extinguiſhed, but it was purified and exalted till it became, hopeleſs as it was, a ſource of the moſt elevated felicity.

In a ſecluded hamlet, not very diſtant from his own manſion, reſided a young gentleman, with whom he formed the moſt agreeable intimacy; his underſtanding and manners excited eſteem and admiration, while a certain melancholy, diffuſed over his countenance, intereſted the heart, and inſpired a wiſh to alleviate the cauſe. He was a young Indian, though of Engliſh extraction; and being, with an only ſiſter, early left an orphan, he returned to this country, to claim the patronage of a ſurviving relative: but he found him gathered to his fathers, when, with the little wreck of his

his fortunes and the young Diana, he retired where Sir Anſtruther diſcovered him.

His ſiſter, the only pride and pleaſure of his life, lured and deceived by the ſpecious arts of a deſigning villain, had, ſome months before, left the kindly ſhelter of his fraternal arms, and lived in elegant, though retired, infamy with her gay, triumphant ſeducer. Seven ſhort weeks had barely elapſed, when the fair flower, fading in decay, and robbed of all its ſweetneſs, was caſt forth, like a loathſome weed, to ſink and die, unknown and unregarded.

A virtuous pride and ingenuous ſhame withheld the lovely culprit from returning to her honeſt, anguiſhed brother's protection; and ſhe was nobly ſtruggling for the morſel moiſtened each day by atoning tears, when, by the cruel artifice of one more hardened and debaſed than herſelf, under the pretext of being accepted as companion, the fiend in female form introduced her to the contaminating manſion of Mrs. O'Con-

nant: there, though her heart was naturally good, her feelings were deadened by the force of pernicious example, and the ſwell of pleaſure was obliterating every better thought, when, by ſome means, her unfortunate brother traced her ſteps to this haunt of licenſed iniquity. Once he was admitted to ſee her, though not alone, when the miſerable girl, diſſolving into tears of bitter remembrance, and ſinking under preſent ſhame, would have inſtantly quitted the ſplendid ſlavery of guilt, and followed him in penitence, through want and wretchedneſs; but, alas! a complicated debt was ſaid to be contracted, which muſt be diſcharged before the unhappy creature could be allowed to depart. All her brother poſſeſſed in the world was inadequate to ſatisfy the demand, and, to detain her, they pretended an arreſt.

A ſtranger to our laws, cuſtoms, and police, and alſo that, though thoſe receptacles ſo ſubverſive of morality, and

deſtructive

deſtructive to peace and ſociety, were tolerated, were alſo puniſhable; in horror, diſconſolation, and deſpair, he returned to his saddened ſolitude, hopeleſs of ever more beholding the dear Diana—the laſt bequeſt of a reverenced dying mother.

Sir Anſtruther Buckingham heard his affecting ſtory delivered in the artleſs language of truth, and inſtantly, with that nobility of ſentiment which diſtinguiſhed his character, reſolved to reſcue the poor deluded Diana from utter deſtruction.

Sir Anſtruther's name and figure were well known, and gained him immediate admiſſion: he knew fineſſe neceſſary, and pretended caprice in his ſelection, indeciſion in his choice, when introduced to the fair ſiſters of impurity; but he *ſuddenly* recollected having ſeen in public a young Indian girl, who belonged to the ſeminary.

She was abſent; but the accommodating lady of the manſion, in a whiſper, recom-

mended to his notice, as he was gallant and generous, a young creature, beautiful, pure, innocent as an angel.

"The terms?" interrupted Sir Anſtruther, ſtarting with horror from the vile ſuggeſtion of the harpy;—"the terms?—Pure! innocent!—Conduct me to her, then, Mrs. O'Connant.

"Oh, to reſcue purity and innocence from ſhame!" thought he, elate with the very idea.

"We act on honor," reſumed Mrs. O'Connant, ſtopping a moment.

"On honor!" repeated Sir Anſtruther, ſtaring at her.

"Yes, Sir Anſtruther, and five hundred is her price."

"Five thouſand!" he cried, with energy, "if *really* innocent, to——" he would have added—"to ſave her!" but Mrs. O'Connant took his hand, ſaying, with a ſmile ſuch as demons wear when virtue falls—

"A

"A contract!"

He bowed—was at the chamber-door—entered—raiſed the hand of one who bore indeed an angel's form. She looked up, and in her look Sir Anſtruther felt the pang, but not the peace of death, for he recogniſed Benigna Fitzalbert!

What followed this interview has been already related; every circumſtance conſpired to confirm the torturing belief that the creature ſo precious to his ſoul, ſo approved by his reaſon, had fallen a victim to the ſeductive arts of Lord Ruthinglenne; and as her wild, diſordered mind, in broken ſentences, burſt on his harrowed ſenſes, in frantic agony, he concluded that with her innocence ſhe had loſt her reaſon. His brain felt burſting with the bitterneſs of thought, and his boſom could ſcarcely contain the burning tumult of his vengeful purpoſes; but who can deſcribe or imagine—who, that has not endured a ſimilar pang, in any way conceive, the enfrenzied

horror that seized each trembling faculty, when, with the wildness of a maniac, she broke from the protecting arms that would have sheltered and sustained her for ever!

Every shaking fibre distended, the energy of thought gave way, and nature, wrung to the last gasp of agony, in the sad oblivion of instant madness he lost remembrance of his torments.

The horrorstruck Mrs. O'Connant, wild with Benigna's escape, and trembling for her own safety, had him respectfully conveyed to his town residence.

In a few weeks his delirium abated; he could reflect, but it was anguish; he could act, but it was without motive, and almost without aim. When reminded of the circumstance, he enabled the amiable brother of poor Diana to redeem her from bondage, and also employed proper people to prosecute Mrs. O'Connant, and indict the house.

Sometimes when Diana spoke of Benigna, he

he would liſten, and his cheeks would glow; when ſhe ſaid ſhe had never known diſhonor there, his eyes would ſhine with momentary joy; and as ſhe added—"Though often attempted, ſomething fatal or terrific always prevented the completion,"—he would repeat, mournfully—"No, no, not always!", and then relapſe into melancholy reverie.

Though thus inactive and inane, he had one ardent deſire, to diſcover Benigna—one determined purpoſe, to avenge her wrongs; but her he feared periſhed—loſt—dead!—Her betrayer he ſuppoſed perpetrating new villanies in a foreign land, and for a time ſecure, beyond his vengeance.

Thus without one hope that could animate his ſpirit, one purſuit to engage his attention, or one being to attach him to life, he lived a cold, unintereſting blank in that ſociety which Nature had formed him to animate, improve, and adorn.

In this condition he had breathed away a

heavy exiſtence for a conſiderable time, when one morning that he had wandered beyond the boundary of his own demeſne, a young man walking at a diſtance with ſlow ſteps, his arms folded, and an evident dejection in his air, attracted his notice, and, though unconſcious why, excited a degree of intereſt in a heart, even in its wanderings generous, kind, and compaſſionate. He watched his motions; they indicated that hopeleſs ſorrow which bends the haughty, and breaks the gentle ſpirit: for ſometimes he appeared to raiſe his eyes to heaven in hope, and then caſt them on the earth with deſpondency.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXV.

"BEREFT of reaſon he appears," ſaid Sir Anſtruther, pityingly, to himſelf; "the guiding ſpark ſeems fled, and, like myſelf, he wanders ſolitary and forlorn."

Soon after he obſerved the melancholy ſtranger quicken his pace, and enter the porch of an old, heavy, Gothic building, which had, in times more ancient, been the manor-houſe, but then occupied by a wealthy farmer, who rented the fields contiguous to it.

"He ſeems moſt unhappy," continued Sir Anſtruther, irrepreſſible emotions impelling

pelling him to follow, and inveſtigate the cauſe; "and it is the only ſolace of miſery like mine to alleviate that of another. Perhaps, not having that which I no longer can enjoy, corrodes his heart; and having it, might reſtore him to ſome kindly breaſt and peace again. I will follow."

The impulſe was ſtrong—it was obeyed, and he entered the old manor-houſe. Meeting no interruption, he aſcended the broken ſteps of a ſtone ſtaircaſe, which led to an antique gallery hung round with tattered armorial bearings, enſigns, and trophies of war, with the various weapons of many a remote century!

He was gazing contemplatively around, when accoſted, in a voice of alarm, by the farmer's wife, with—

"What may you pleaſe to want?"

As much as poſſibly in his power, he ſoftened the gloomy reſerve his open countenance had contracted, as he replied—

"Forgive

"Forgive the intruſion, my good miſtreſs; my buſineſs is with——"

Eternal Powers! what a moment for Sir Anſtruther!

Aſtoniſhed, pale, and dejected, before him ſtood the once gay, glowing, happy, and triumphant Lord Ruthinglenne! The languor of diſappointment had dulled thoſe eyes which ſo lately ſhone with the luſtre of hope and happineſs, and in his pallid countenance appeared the incontrollable dejection of a ſuffering ſpirit; but at the ſight of Sir Anſtruther, unconſcious of offence, and thinking he was to embrace a friend, whoſe boſom would ſympathize in his afflictions, a momentary ray of pleaſure threw a ſudden glow over every fine expreſſive feature, and he would have ruſhed forward to embrace him, but that ſtrong and bitter repulſe ſat frowning on his indignant brow.

Electric as the lightning's flaſh his figure ſtruck upon Sir Anſtruther's ſight; and for a time, agitated with complicated paſſions, he

ſtood immoveable and mute; unconquerable indignation, burning rage, and deep, determined vengeance, had long been gathering within his breaſt, and having collected force and violence from its repreſſion, it now had reached a fearful climax, and was ready to burſt over the devoted head.

A firm determination was winding up every ſhaking fibre; he was ſtill, but the ſtillneſs was deceiving, for the utmoſt bitterneſs of human indignation gnawed at his heart, and quivered on his lips, and he could not give utterance to a ſingle word, till Lord Ruthinglenne, in painful aſtoniſhment at ſuch ſtrange emotion, would have taken his hand: then the hot, impetuous ſpirit broke forth, and ſtarting, as if from an adder's envenomed ſting, in a voice appalling and terrific he cried—

"Benigna!"

The deepeſt crimſon flaſhed Lord Ruthinglenne's face at the name, but it inſtantly yielded to the paleneſs of death, and

and in diſconſolation he repeated, with a ſigh—

"Benigna!"

"You went to marry her!" reſumed Sir Anſtruther, with bitter, torturing contempt.

"To marry her!" reiterated Ruthinglenne, holding his head, while maddening recollection was whirling his brain to the wildeſt chaos—"to marry her!—Oh—Oh Buckingham!"

"Aye, groan for mercy; one I can allow thee, thou moſt accurſed!—But words!—no more! Theſe ſpeak beſt my purpoſe!" tearing from the wall two ruſty ſwords—"theſe beſt ſpeak the purpoſe of a ſoul, to level thee low as thy vileneſs has reduced an angel! Villain!—now—Benigna in thy dying ear to ſting thee—blaſt thee deeper—my voice ſhall roar Benigna!"

Lord Ruthinglenne, ſerene in unaccuſing conſcience, and willing to rectify miſapprehenſion, retreated a few paces from his violent aſſailant.

"Buckingham!"

"Buckingham!" ſaid he, fortified by the dignity of innocence, "and is it mine at laſt to teach *you* moderation?"

"Perdition ſeal thy venomed lips!—thy very breath is poiſon to the air!—Take that," throwing the ſword—"take it; elſe I ſhall become aſſaſſin, and plunge it in the blackened heart that gave an angel to pollution and deſpair!".

Lord Ruthinglenne ſtarted; ſomething, he knew not what, felt too mighty within; but the ſtruggle was ſilent, the fiercer fires of his ſoul were pale; diſappointed bliſs and conſequent reflection had taught him forbearance, and he would fain have appeaſed the raging tempeſt that ſhook the breaſt of Sir Anſtruther, and juſtified he knew not what accuſation againſt himſelf; and had his friend retained any of his former exalted moderation, or amiable placidity of temper, he would not only have liſtened, but inveſtigated the doubtful manner of the once impetuous Ruthinglenne; for, ſpite of the boiling indignation that convulſed his

his frame, he knew not whether to impute the forbearance he witneſſed, to the fortitude of conſcious rectitude, or the hardihood of emboldened, atrocious guilt. But again the form of Benigna, deranged in reaſon, deſtroyed in peace, diſrobed of honor, wandering, periſhing, loſt, dead—broke, in ſaddened array, on his perturbed imagination, and again a ſtrong and bitter immutability of ſpirit hardened every feeling, and revived the momentary laple of vengeance. With renewed fury, he cried—

"No more! thy helliſh arts are vain—are loſt on one who knows thee and thy vileneſs! Thou canſt not, Oh thou foul betrayer! reſtore Benigna's innocence, nor I forego my deal, my honeſt vengeance!

"Draw, then, villain! monſter! coward! baſe betrayer, draw! not to defend, but ſhrink, appalled, and fall before the righteous purpoſe that now nerves my heart, and ſtrengthens my determined arm!"

"I married not Benigna," cried Lord Ruthinglenne; but his words were loſt in

the loud vehemence of his opponent's voice.

"I married not Benigna—but can——"

"Can!" vociferated Sir Anſtruther, fighting, and gaining on him every inſtant—"can bleed—die—expiate! Now, tyrant! villain! now Benigna is avenged, and—and Buckingham is ſatisfied!"

He might; the ruſty hanger, that had corroded in the damp of mouldering ages, had pierced the wronged, the unoffending breaſt of the generous Ruthinglenne; he fell—the enſanguined ſtream guſhed from the gaping wound in torrents: the chilling dew of death hung on his livid brows, his eyes cloſed, and with all that remained of utterance, his cold, quivering lips pronounced—

"Benigna—innocence—pardon!"

Once again his receding eye opened, the pallid lip moved, and the faintening ſound—"Fly!" was diſtinguiſhable.

"Fly!" repeated Sir Anſtruther, every wilder paſſion ſinking into ſaddened calm—"fly!

"fly! Where—wherefore? Innocence!—pardon!—Oh tremendous!—a murderer!"

He looked on the cold, proſtrate form; already had the guſhing torrent ceaſed, the blood congealed, and the countenance, though ſhaded in the aſhy hue of death, ſtill evidenced the mild, melting expreſſion of innocence and pardon.

Sir Anſtruther threw his own agonized frame upon the ſenſeleſs body, and, as in anguiſh he contemplated each livid feature, every ſtormy paſſion expired, human reſentment and imputed injury were forgotten, and only the remembrance that he himſelf was a murderer, had avenged his own wrongs, and defied his Maker, lived in his harrowed memory; and the extremeſt horror of frenzy was ſeizing his brain, and glaring in his heavy eye, when the farmer, alarmed by the ſtrange relation of his wife, that a madman was broke in, and was murdering the lodger gentleman, with half the village at his heels, entered, if poſſible to prevent the miſchief.

The

The men secured the unresisting Sir Anstruther, while the women and children, who had been fed by the bounty, and cheered by the unostentatious kindness of the lamented deceased, knelt around his inanimate remains, mourning him as their friend, adviser, benefactor, and provider.

Sir Anstruther heard them; every word struck daggers; a fearful conviction that the triumphant guilt of a seducer would have fled from retirement, and all the gentler offices of humanity, which shine so mildly in the silent shade of life, gave horror to his heart. The rod of remorse was raised; and fell with heaviness on a being who had erred in the fatal effervescence of the bolder and more ardent passions.

"No escape is meditated," said he, indignantly calm, to those who rudely held him in their eager grasp, "no, I murdered, am amenable to justice. Guard with reverence that hallowed corpse," he added, proudly, though agony was rending his frame, "guard it well: he bore distinguished

guiſhed rank, and—Oh—he *may* have been moſt——"

He ſtopped—a burning tear ſtood in his gloomy eye, but pride repelled the ſoftening dew; a dark, uncertain ſentiment, ſomething between anguiſh and apprehenſion, chilled it before it could reach his tenſive cheek—he ſpoke a very few words more—

"Seal up his papers; his affairs are too ſacred for vulgar inſpection; ſeal them up! No more! Take me now hence; I am your priſoner."

The body of Lord Ruthinglenne was borne by the weeping villagers to the chamber he had occupied, and laid decently on that bed, on which, with reverence and holy affection, he had contemplated her and her virtues for whom he had fallen; while Sir Anſtruther, with all his generous ſenſibilities revived, his heart bleeding at every pore, and every tender feeling wrung to torture, was goaded on, amid the execrations of the village multitude, to the houſe of a neighbouring Juſtice.

He

He was known to the gentleman, and inſtantly reſcued from the further inſults of his exaſperated accuſers.

The name of Sir Anſtruther Buckingham ſtood high in the county, and his character being fair and honorable, he was inſtantly admitted to bail.

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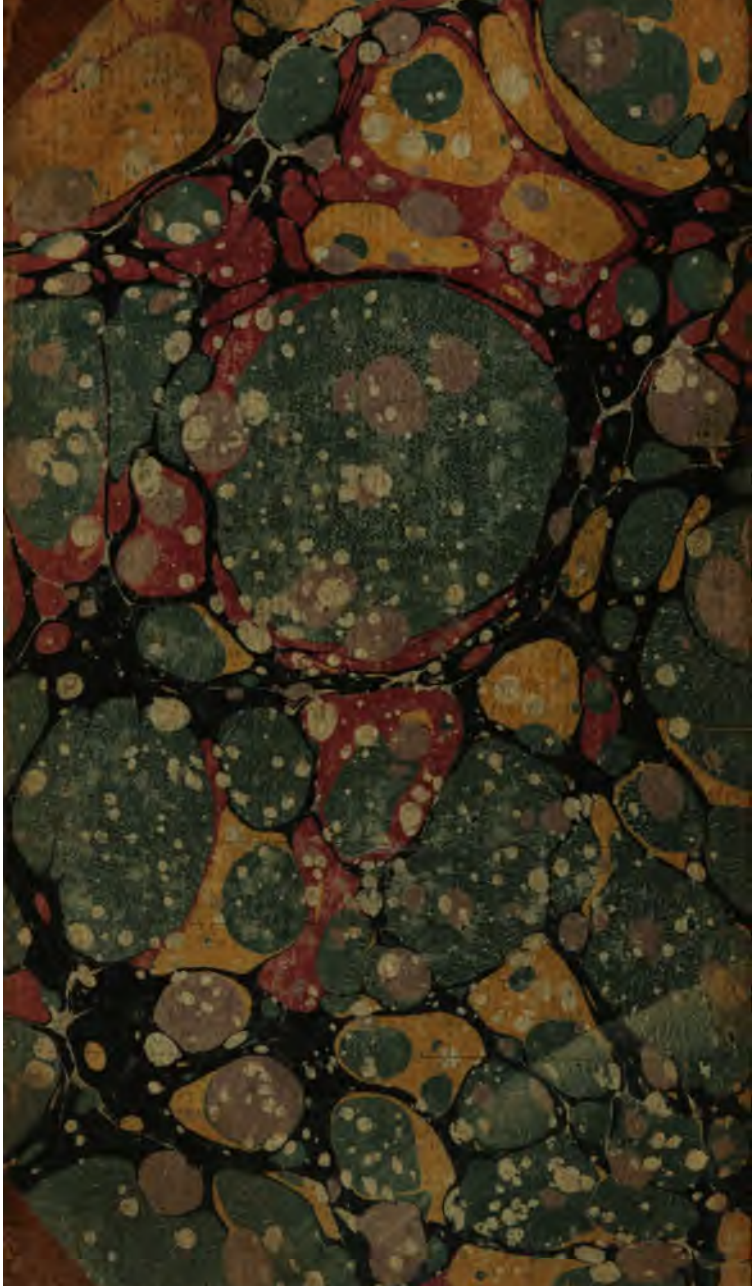
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